

West Lothian Housing Partnership

Allocations Policy and Procedure

Approved 11th February 2004

WEST LOTHIAN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Allocations Policy

1 INTRODUCTION

West Lothian Housing Partnership (WLHP) believe the principle aim of this Allocations Policy is to ensure the allocation of good quality housing to those with a clear and identifiable need, at a rent they can afford. In formulating this policy the Partnership has taken into account guidelines issued by Communities Scotland and the Scottish Federation of Housing Association, as well as all relevant legislation.

2 OBJECTIVES OF ALLOCATION POLICY

The Allocations Policy is designed to meet the following objectives:-

- to be fair and consistent in the allocation of tenancies;
- to meet the needs of housing applicants as far as possible within the limits set by scarce resources;
- to contribute to achieving stable and balanced communities;
- to make best use of available housing stock;
- to be flexible and take account of changing circumstances;
- to facilitate mobility for reasons of family support and employment;
- to complement the housing provision of other housing providers in West Lothian.

3 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

3.1 In promising a policy of equality of opportunity and access to its housing, the Partnership will ensure that no applicant for housing receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of sex or marital status, on racial grounds, or on grounds of disability, age, sexual orientation, language or social origin, or other personal attributes, including beliefs or opinions such as religious beliefs or political opinions.

3.2 Applicants are asked to provide details of their gender, income, disability and ethnic origin in order that this section of the policy can be monitored although provision of the information is entirely voluntary.

3.3 In the event of nomination requests or WLHP lets the shortlist of applicants names will be passed to the managing agents representative for assessment under WLHP criteria.

3.4 A senior officer of the West Lothian Housing Partnership will have final approval of any offers.

4 ACCESS TO INFORMATION/CONFIDENTIALITY

4.1 The confidentiality of applicants' and tenants' personal information revealed in their application forms, learned through interview or in contact with the applicant or tenant, will be scrupulously respected by any member of staff in possession of, or having access to, the information.

- 4.2 Under the Data Protection Act 1998 an applicant has the right to see any information stored about him or her on computer. The Partnership will respond to any request to view the information held on computer or to have sight of any personal records maintained by the Partnership, through it's Managing Agent.

ADMISSION TO THE PARTNERSHIP'S HOUSING LIST

- 5.1 The Housing List will be open as follows: -

Applications will be accepted from any person who has attained the age of 16 years.

- 5.2 Applicants can apply for any village or town within West Lothian, where the Partnership has houses, and there is no restriction on the number of area options an applicant can choose.

- 5.3 Where it is agreed that additional support services are required the Partnership will consider providing such support in conjunction with other agencies.

- 5.4 Having accepted an application for admission to the Partnerships housing list an assessment will be made of the applicant's circumstances in accordance with the Partnerships allocations policy and procedures.

- 5.5 The Partnership will reserve the right to withhold an offer of housing where it can demonstrate that the applicant has recently (in the last two years) been responsible for or could be responsible for serious problems caused to other tenants or neighbours. This requires the Partnership to provide evidence that anti-social behaviour has occurred e.g. from a previous landlord or other official source and that measures to address the problem e.g. adequate housing support could not appropriately assist the applicant.

- 5.6 The Partnership reserve the right to withhold an offer of housing where an applicant has arrears of rent or service charges on a current or former tenancy which amount to more than one month of the annual amount payable. An exception will be made where an applicant has agreed arrangements with his/her landlord for paying the outstanding liability, has made payments in accordance with that arrangement for at least 3 months and is continuing to make such payments.

6 THE APPLICATION FORM

- 6.1 An application for housing must be made on the Partnership's application form or other approved common application form which may be developed by housing partners in the West Lothian area and help is available to anyone who has difficulty completing the form. As the initial assessment of priority is based on the information provided by the applicant, efforts have been made to design an application form which is "user friendly" whilst gathering sufficient information.

- 6.2 Incomplete applications will be followed up by letter or telephone to ensure that applicants less able or familiar with forms receive equal consideration. Where an applicant seeks re-housing on medical or health grounds he/she will be required to complete a medical assessment form

7. HOUSING LISTS

7.1 System

The Partnership, through its Managing Agent, will operate an IT based housing list.

7.2 Areas of Choice

Applicants may choose the areas they wish to live and may choose more than one area.

7.3 Types and Size of House

Applications are held on computer database which records location preferred, type and size of housing required as well as applications considered for more specialist type housing

7.4 Housing Lists

Application for housing may be considered under one or more of the following lists: -

Housing for People with Physical Disabilities

The Partnership recognises that individuals in the community require access to housing which is suitable for those with physical disabilities and their families and endeavours to include this in their development. A separate housing list is held for these specially designed flats and houses. Applicants with a disability will receive priority in allocating these properties, over any other person on the housing list. Supplementary information from doctors, occupational therapists or social workers may be required to support applications for housing in this category.

In the event that the individual who requires the wheelchair adaptations is no longer residing in the accommodation, the remaining tenant/s will be actively assisted by the Partnership to obtain alternative accommodation either within WLHP's own stock or by working in partnership with other registered social landlords.

Where there is a demand for such wheelchair accommodation the remaining tenant/s will be given priority equivalent to that of the applicant at the top of the list for the wheelchair housing currently occupied by the remaining tenant/s. Such situations will be handled sensitively by the Managing Agent staff who will recognise that while the wheelchair adaptations are no longer required, other family members may well have lived there for many years in what has been their home too.

General Needs

All other applicants will be maintained on a general needs waiting list.

7.5 Review of Housing Lists

Each application will be reviewed at least annually within a rolling review programme and may be reviewed more frequently in the areas of highest demand or turnover. Applicants indicating a change of circumstances will have their application re-assessed and will be advised of their new priority status. All applicants are advised to inform the Partnership of any changes in circumstances as these occur. Applicants who do not respond to the review letter within 21 days will have their application cancelled.

You will be considered by the Partnership to be adequately housed and will be removed from the housing list if you:

- Purchase your existing home under Right to Buy legislation
- Purchase any other house
- Accept an offer of housing from any other housing provider e.g. Registered Social Landlord or Local Authority
- Move through Mutual Exchange
- Become a joint tenant/owner

8 ASSESSMENT OF HOUSING NEED

8.1 A points scheme is used to compare the housing needs of all housing applicants.

The scheme applies both to people who are already tenants of WLHP and wish to transfer to other Partnership accommodation and to those who are not WLHP tenants.

8.2 Through the implementation of a needs based points scheme the Partnership aims to give points for re-housing to those in greatest housing need. The points scheme should exclude the possibility of inconsistency, favouritism or discrimination.

9 HOUSING NEED

The following categories of priority apply to WLHP's allocations:

9.1 Homelessness

Priority for homeless applicants will be given. Applicants assessed by the council as homeless or threatened with homelessness and in priority need, under the Housing (Scotland) Act will receive 3 points. An assessment is not required if in the view of the Managing Agent the applicant would be assessed as homeless.

A person is in priority need if:

- a) He or she has suffered homelessness or the threat of homelessness because of an emergency such as a fire or flood, or other disaster;
- b) She is pregnant;
- c) he or she is someone living with a dependent child and with whom a dependent child might reasonably be expected to live;
- d) He or she is a person vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or handicap or physical disability or for other special reason;
- e) He or she is residing, or might reasonably be expected to reside with, a person in categories (b) and (d); or
- f) he or she is under 21 and was previously looked after by a local authority ("previously termed in care") at school leaving age or later.

Applicants who have been assessed, but are not in priority need will receive 2 points.

Referrals by the council under Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 will receive a further 2 points, to comply with WLHP's obligations under that Act.

9.2 Overcrowding

Applicants who are assessed as overcrowded will receive this priority. There will be a single award of 2 points. This assessment will be on the basis of the following standard:

For each couple	1 bedroom
For each single adult or child aged 10 or over	1 bedroom
For up to two children both under 10	1 bedroom

Where an applicant's situation leads to overcrowding as defined in the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, an additional 2 points will be awarded.

9.3 Poor housing conditions

Applicants living in poor housing conditions will receive 3 points. This is defined as housing that is Below the Tolerable Standard (Structurally stable, substantially free from rising or penetrating damp, satisfactory provision for natural and artificial lighting, for ventilation and for heating, an adequate piped supply of wholesome water available within the house, a sink provided with a satisfactory supply of both hot and cold water within the house, a water closet available for the exclusive use of the occupants of the house and suitably located within the house, a fixed bath or shower and a wash-hand basin, each provided with a satisfactory supply of both hot and cold water and suitably located within the house, an effective system for the drainage and disposal of foul and surface water, satisfactory facilities for the cooking of food within the house, satisfactory access to all external doors and outbuildings).

9.4 Health or support needs

Applicants assessed as having health requirements or support needs which would be resolved by moving home will receive priority. Assessments of the applicant's level of need will be made by a health professional or social worker or occupational therapist, with the Managing Agent assessing the suitability of their present accommodation, in consultation with any relevant assessor or support agency.

The award will either be higher priority of 2 points, or lower priority of 1 point. The higher priority will be where there is both a high level of need, and high level of difficulty in their present accommodation. The lower level of priority will be where there is a lower level of need, or lower level of difficulty experienced in their present accommodation. There will be a single assessment of health and support needs, and multiple awards will not be made. Where two people on the same application have needs, or where one person has both health and support needs, a single assessment will be made.

A health need is a requirement for the allocation of any house adapted for use by the disabled.

9.5 Security of tenure

Applicants who do not have security of tenure will receive an award of 1 point. This will only apply where they have not been assessed as homeless.

9.6 HOMES applications

Applicants under the HOMES mobility scheme will receive priority, and 1 point.

9.7 Points award

Awards of points will be cumulative except where noted. There will continue to be no priority for waiting time or local connection. Applicants with equal numbers of points will be prioritised in date order of application.

The table below summarises the policy

Homeless High	Assessed as (potentially) homeless and in priority need	3
Overcrowding	Insufficient bedrooms	2/4
Poor housing	Below the Tolerable Standard	3
Section 5 referral	Additional priority	2
Homeless	Assessed or would be as (potentially) homeless but not in priority need	2
Health High	High need, and present housing highly unsuitable	2
Support needs High	High need, and present housing highly unsuitable	2
Health Low	Lower health need, and present housing unsuitable	1
Support needs Low	Lower health need, and present housing unsuitable	1
Sharing	No security of tenure	1
HOMES	Homes mobility scheme application	1

10 LOCAL CONNECTION AND WAITING TIME

There will be no award of points in relation to an applicant's local connection to an area nor their length of time on the list.

Waiting time i.e. date of application will only be considered when more than one applicant qualifies for an offer with the same amount of points.

In this instance the offer will go to the applicant with the earliest date of application.

11 REFUSALS

11.1 If the first offer of housing is refused, the applicant will be entitled to a second offer if their application reaches the top of the Housing List.

11.2 If the second offer is refused, the application will be removed from the Housing List. In these circumstances applicants, if they still require housing, will be able to submit a new application for housing with the Partnership but any further offers will be suspended for 12 months from the date of the second refusal.

13 ALLOCATIONS TO BOARD MEMBERS, AND THEIR RELATIVES

13.1 WLHP will deal with all housing applications fairly. It will fully comply with the principles set down in section 15 of the Housing Association Act 1985, the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and Communities Scotland guidance notes.

13.2 WLHP will record in the Register of Benefits where a house is allocated to any of the following:

- a current WLHP trustee;
- a close relative of a current WLHP Trustee;
- former WLHP Trustees who have served within the last 12 months;
- close relatives of a former WLHP Trustee who have served within the last 12 months.

- 13.3 Before any of the above are considered for housing the Senior Officer of the West Lothian Housing Partnership will review the application and approve the offer of housing.

14 RIGHT OF APPEAL AND COMPLAINTS

- 14.1 Any applicant who wishes to query the assessment of their application by housing management staff may do so in the first instance with the Senior Officer of the Managing Agent. It is hoped that any problems will be thus resolved, promptly and informally. If the applicant remains dissatisfied he or she will have the right of appeal, in writing, first to the Senior Officer of the West Lothian Housing Partnership and thereafter to the Board of Management which shall appoint three members of the Appeals Panel, normally including the Convenor of Housing and Technical Services Sub Committee, to consider the complaint or appeal and to call a hearing.
- 14.2 Any applicant who is dissatisfied with the allocations procedures and the way in which they have been administered and wishes to make a complaint has the right to do so. The applicant will be advised of the Partnership's complaint procedures with final right to complain to the Public Services Ombudsman. Complaints or comments about the policy as distinct from the procedures should be directed in the first instance to the Senior Officer of the West Lothian Housing Partnership and thereafter to the Board of Management.

15 MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE POLICY

- 15.1 Statistical information on applicants and allocations will be provided quarterly to the Board of Management to allow it to monitor the implementation of this policy and be satisfied that performance standards are being met.
- 15.2 It is also the role of the Board of Management to oversee the Allocations function of the Partnership. Its role can be defined as having responsibility for:
- The formulation of the Allocations Policy;
 - Monitoring the policy and practice;
 - Consideration of any proposed allocation falling outwith the Policy;
 - Ensuring standards are maintained and the Association meets Communities Scotland/SFHA performance standards.

WEST LoTHIAN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Allocations Procedures

1 POLICY AND PROCEDURAL CONTEXT

West Lothian Council has a centralised Allocations Team. One designated Allocations Officer within the team will deal with allocations for West Lothian Housing Partnership (WLHP) on behalf of the Managing Agent.

Until the Partnership has its own housing list, the designated Allocations Officer will use the Councils housing list to identify potential nominees for housing. They will apply the criteria for the selection of an applicant from the Councils list. Applicant's details will then be passed to the managing agent's representative for assessment under WLHP criteria.

Prior to any offer being made, an independent senior officer of the managing agent will review nominations being made by the managing agent (West Lothian Council) to the West Lothian Housing Partnership and approve the offer of housing

The process for allocations is as outlined below.

2 MAINTAINING THE HOUSING LIST

2.1 Application Forms/Explanatory Booklets

Application forms and booklets are as clear and jargon free as possible, and are printed in a reasonably large typeface. Information is available on where to return the application form, any necessary items to enclose with the form, and details on what happens next.

2.2 Housing List

The Housing List is a list of applicants for housing, which gives detail on current circumstances and need. Points are awarded to applicants based on their current circumstances, in line with WLHP policy.

Applicants are required to notify WLHP or its agent, the Council, of any changes in circumstances after their initial application. The designated Allocations Officer will deal with all changes of circumstances. If the Area Office is notified of any change in circumstances, the Housing Officer will pass details to the designated Allocations Officer on the day details are received. Notification must be in writing or on the form provided.

The designated Allocations Officer will:

- Re-assess the applicant's eligibility to remain on the Housing List. If they are not eligible to remain, s/he will write to the applicant and cancel the application;
- If the applicant is still eligible, the designated Allocations Officer will check to see if the points level already awarded needs to be changed. If not, the designated Allocations Officer will amend the application accordingly and confirm this in writing to the applicant;
- If points are affected, the designated Allocations Officer will re-point the application and update any computer records;
- Inform the applicant of any amended points details in writing;

- Sign the change of circumstance form when all work is completed and file this with application.

3 THE ALLOCATIONS PROCESS

3.1 Shortlisting Applicant/Property Matching

The designated Allocations Officer will produce a shortlist of names of applicants in points order, taking account of:

- The type, size and location of the property available for offer;
- The suitability of the property for disabled persons;
- Any concerns expressed on the Void Update/Home Visit Sheets by the Area Housing Officer concerning a specific applicant or allocation.

The designated Allocations Officer will check that the application and computer records of any shortlisted cases match:

- If not, s/he will re-assess the case to see if the applicant still qualifies for the offer;
- If not, s/he will amend the details on the application form/computer records, and write to the applicant and eliminate the applicant from consideration, or re-shortlist the applicant if necessary;
- If the applicant still qualifies, s/he will amend the details on the application/computer and retain this for consideration.

3.2 Pre-Allocation of Property

- The designated Allocations Officer will pre-allocate a property within 3 working days of notification of termination date and pass information to the Managing Agents Representative for assessment.
- The Managing Agent Representative will then visit the successful applicant with details of the property on offer. The Managing Agent will send a letter if telephone contact is not possible and determine if the applicant is interested in the offer.
- If the applicant is not interested, the Managing Agent will notify the designated Allocations Officer.
- The designated Allocations Officer will then issue a letter confirming that the offer was made and that the applicant has refused it as well as the implications of the refusal.
- If the applicant is interested, the Managing Agent representative will arrange for a formal offer letter to be sent to the applicant, informing them to make contact within 2 working days to make an appointment to view the property, and indicating that otherwise the offer will be withdrawn. The letter will state that the offer is made on the basis of information supplied at the time of application, and any change of circumstances must be reported.
- If there is no contact within the deadline, the Managing Agent representative will inform the designated Allocations Officer who will withdraw the offer.
- The designated Allocations Officer will write to applicants who either refuse an offer or fail to respond within the stated deadline, outlining the impact on their application.

3.3 Accompanied Viewing

The Managing Agent Representative will:

- When the applicant contacts them, check the applicants details to ensure that they still qualify for the offer;
- Agree an appointment with the applicant and accompany them to view the property when it is ready for viewing;
- Advise the designated Allocations Officer that the applicant has made contact;
- At the viewing the Managing Agent representative will discuss the condition of the property with the applicant, and negotiate and reach agreement with the applicant on any outstanding repairs that are required to be carried out by the landlord. They will also discuss any outstanding issues that are not the responsibility of the landlord, so that the applicant is fully informed on what to expect;
- Where the offer is accepted, arrange for the applicant to sign for the tenancy as per the 'Tenancy Sign-up Procedure';
- Advise the designated Allocations Officer of any sign-up arrangements to allow computer work to be done and applicants file to be sent to the Area Office;
- If the offer is refused, ask the applicant to confirm their reasons for the refusal in writing;
- Telephone the designated Allocations Officer to advise of any refusal and the need to make a further offer to a new applicant;
- Notify the applicant of the consequences of their refusal;
- If the refusal is the second reasonable offer, cancel the application and notify the applicant.

3.4 Tenancy Sign-Up

The Managing Agent Representative will:

- Sign up the applicant during the accompanied viewing or invite the applicant to the Area Office to complete the sign-up process;
- Give the applicant all appropriate documentation and information concerning the tenancy;
- If appropriate, complete a Housing Benefit form and calculate an estimated entitlement;
- Invite the applicant to pay the first weeks rent in advance
- Complete a New Tenant Form to fax to the designated Allocations Officer.

3.5 'Special Cases'

A 'special' allocation will be deemed as such only if it cannot be addressed within the established Allocations Policy of WLHP, or requires a variation from the policy. Special cases will be considered highly exceptional. In such cases the approval of WLHP Board will normally be sought.

3.6 Dealing with Refusals

If the first offer of housing is refused, the applicant will be entitled to a second offer if their application reaches the top of the Housing List.

If the second offer is refused, the application will be removed from the Housing List. In these circumstances applicants, if they still require housing, will be able to submit a new application for housing with the Partnership but any further offers will be suspended for 12 months from the date of the second refusal

In the event of a second offer being refused the designated Allocations Officer will:

- Suspend the application of an applicant refusing an offer, upon being informed by the Managing Agents Representative;
- Write to the applicant advising that their application has been cancelled.
- Advise applicants of the appeals procedure.

4	MONITORING AND REVIEW
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4.1 General

Results of the allocation process will be regularly monitored, reported to WLHP and acted upon as part of an ongoing review process.

Monitoring who applies for a house and who actually gets housed is a key way in which WLHP can assess whether the outcome of the Policy matches its aims and will form part of WLHP's overall internal management planning.

Factors to be monitored by the Designated Allocations Officer and Managing Agent Representative will include:

- New lets and relets as a proportion of the stock;
- The ratio of direct housing lets/nominations/transfers etc;
- The housing need factors leading to re-housing (e.g. homelessness);
- Ethnic origin, gender, age, family composition, and disability where this is possible;
- Offers refused and reasons for refusal;
- Basic information on applications not admitted to the list;
- The number of applications outstanding;
- The time taken to process applications.

Quarterly reports will be prepared for the Board of Management by the Managing A

4.2 Housing List – Performance Standards

Objective

To maintain an accurate, up-to-date Housing List.

Measures

Amendments to individual applications and the overall Housing List

Targets

95% of all amendments dealt with in 3 days

Responsibilities

The Designated Allocations Officer deals with all amendments to applications and the Housing List.

4.3 Accompanied Viewing – Performance Standards

Objective

To encourage the take-up of offers of accompanied viewing by housing applicants

Measures

Number of accompanied viewing
Refusals where accompanied viewing
takes place

Refusals where accompanied viewing
is declined

Targets

95%

Inform all prospective tenants of the
opportunity to view a property

Include details of viewing in monitoring
of refusals

Minimise number of refusals

Responsibilities

Managing Agent Representative will arrange and undertake all viewing and refer any
problems identified to the Senior Officer Managing Agent.

4.4 Offer of a Tenancy - Performance Objectives

Objective

To process all offers accurately adhering to legislation and policy.

To provide accurate advice and assistance on the offer of a tenancy.

Measures

Accuracy of records

Adherence to legislation/policy

Time taken – applicant/property matching

Time taken – visit/make offer of a property

Speed of acceptance by applicant

Targets

100%

100%

1 day

95% in 2 days

2 days

Responsibilities

Designated Allocations Officer in appropriate liaison with Senior Officer Managing Agent
and Managing Agent Representative.

The personnel identified in this policy and procedure document are as follows:

Managing Agent Representative-	Claire Motion, Housing Manager WLHP
Senior Officer Managing Agent-	Martin Armstrong, Head of Housing and Customer Services
Independent Senior Officer Managing Agent	John Reid, Housing Policy and Development Manager West Lothian Council
Senior Officer West Lothian Housing Partnership	Niall Patterson, West Lothian Housing Partnership