

Allocation policy

The purpose of this policy is to explain to Co-op Tenant/Members and housing applicants how we manage our housing lists and how we allocate our vacant houses.

The Co-op is committed to carrying out our application and allocation service in an open, fair, sensitive, and non-discriminatory manner.

To achieve this commitment we will:



follow the application and allocation rules contained in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and in the Scottish Executive's circular about housing lists and allocations which was published in February 2002



always keep our housing list open to applicants who are 16 years old and over and who are seeking public sector housing in the Craigmillar area of Edinburgh



widely publicise our application service



work with other public sector landlords in Edinburgh to offer a simple "one door" approach to public sector housing in Edinburgh



give priority to applicants in the greatest housing need



regularly monitor our service taking into account the views of those who use our service



set ourselves challenging targets and report our performance to both Co-op Tenant/Members and applicants

1. Our houses

We have 201 new and modernised homes in the Niddrie House area of Craigmillar in East Edinburgh. We have both houses and flats, which range in size from 1 - 4 bedroom homes. We have a few amenity houses and a few houses designed to suit people who have a disability. Usually about 15 houses become vacant each year.

Our houses are for rent only and we do not offer the Right to Buy.

2. Co-op Membership

The Co-op is a Fully Mutual Housing Co-operative this means only members or prospective members can become Tenants. Housing applicants must attend a membership interview, which is conducted by two Committee Members. Applicants are asked why they wish to become a Co-op Tenant and how they will handle certain situations if they become a Tenant/Member. We do not ask about their personal or housing circumstances. The Full Management Committee decides if an application is successful and if an applicant is not satisfied with the Committee's decision, they have the right to appeal. The membership fee is £1.00 and this is due by the applicant only if they become a Tenant.

3. Allocations to Committee Members' close relatives

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 prohibits Committee Members and their close relatives from benefiting from their position. However because we are a Co-op and only Co-op Tenants can join the Management Committee we are exempt from this rule and we are allowed to allocate houses to Committee Members and their close relatives.

We will assess applications from Committee Members and their close relatives strictly in line with our allocation policy and we will show no favouritism. The Full Management Committee must approve an allocation to a Committee Member or their relative. A Schedule 7 benefit form will be completed and signed by the Committee Member involved and by our Secretary. We will attached the schedule 7 form to the minute of the committee meeting and file it in the "Schedule 7 Benefit Folder". This folder is available for inspection by the Scottish Housing Regulator.

4. Equal opportunities

The Co-op is a partner of Edindex, Edinburgh's common housing register, and we advertise most of our vacant houses in the Edinburgh Evening News. Access to the Edindex register is always open to all applicants 16 years old and over.

Applications are accepted and allocations made irrespective of the applicant's race, colour, religion, sexual orientation, or disability.

This policy is available in Braille, large print and can be translated for applicants whose first language is not English. We will pay for the cost of an interpreter for applicants who have hearing or visual disabilities or whose first language is not English.

We carry out an annual equal opportunities audit to make sure that we promote equal opportunities for all. Our Management Committee monitors this audit and we will take appropriate action if we do not meet our own equality targets.

5. Edindex

The Co-op is a partner of Edindex, which is the organisation that manages Edinburgh's common housing register. Edindex is a partnership of 25 housing organisations, including the Edinburgh City Council, who have agreed to have one housing register and one housing application form for people who want to apply to rent a public sector house in Edinburgh.

Edindex forms are available from the Co-op office, from all Council Neighbourhood offices, and from any of the Edindex partners. (a list of the Edindex partners is attached). We will help applicants, not just applicants wishing to register for a Co-op house, to complete the application form, or when requested we can find out their status on the Edindex register.

Completed applications can be returned to our office, Edindex or any other Edindex partner, (a list of the Edindex partners is attached). Edindex will send an acknowledgement of receipt of the form within five working days. Recording, updating and cancelling applications are managed centrally by the Edindex administration unit.

Applications will only be cancelled on the death of the applicant, on the applicant's written request or if they do not respond to the annual review.

Applicants are encouraged to inform Edindex when their housing or family circumstances change. This can be done by contacting us or any of the Edindex partners.

We keep confidential all information disclosed by applicants. Applicants have the right to inspect the information Edindex or we keep about them.

We will make inquiries to confirm the accuracy of the information provided by the applicant and with the applicant's permission take up tenancy references from previous landlords.

6. EH - Your Key to Choice

The Co-op adopted the Edindex "EH - Key for Choice" scheme in March 2008.

There are two parts to this scheme:

- a) the classification of applicants
and
- b) the advertisement of vacant houses, which applicants can bid for.

a) Classification of applicants

Applicants are classified as a "starter" or "mover".

Applicants are classed as a "starter" if they are:

- homeless
- staying with a friend or relative
- staying in a hostel
- staying in supported accommodation
- having a relationship breakdown
- renting a house or flat from a private landlord.

Applicants are classed as a "mover" if they are:

- a council tenant
- a tenant of a housing association or co-op
- part of a joint tenancy with the council, housing association, or co-op
- a tenant in tied accommodation provided by an employer
- an owner-occupier.

b) Advertising vacancies and bids

The Co-op's vacant houses are advertised (along with the vacancies of the other Edindex partners) each week on the EH Key for Choice website and in the Monday edition of the Edinburgh Evening News. Free copies of the Evening News supplement are available at all Council Neighbourhood Offices, Housing Associations, Co-operatives and libraries. Applicants can surf the internet free at their local library.

Notes of interest

Applicants can choose up to three homes and to note an interest they must complete the form in the Evening News or click on "Note of interest" on the EH Key to Choice website. Notes of interest must be returned before the advertised closing date.

7. Suspensions

We will suspend applicants from an offer of accommodation for the following reasons:

- ◇ debt
- ◇ anti-social behaviour

- ◇ their membership application is refused
- ◇ failing to respond to the Co-op's letters
- ◇ giving fraudulent or false information

All applicants will be informed in writing of the period of suspension, the reason for the suspension and the action they need to take to have the suspension lifted.

We keep a record of the number and details of applicants we suspend and this is available for inspection by the Scottish Regulator.

Debt

Applicants will be suspended for debt including rent arrears, service charges, rechargeable repairs, and the costs incurred when clearing an abandoned house. The suspension will apply until the debt is paid except in the following circumstances:

- ◇ rent arrears are less than the value of their monthly rent charge
- ◇ the debt was due for a tenancy which ended more than five years ago
- ◇ the rent arrear is due on a current tenancy or one that ended within the last five years and the applicant has made an arrangement with their landlord to clear this arrear and has kept this arrangement for at least three months
- ◇ the arrear is a confirmed technical arrear

Anti-social behaviour

Violent or threatening behaviour towards Staff and/or Committee Members will be reported to the police. This type of behaviour will result in the applicant being suspended from receiving an offer of accommodation from the Co-op.

Applicants who have been evicted for anti social behaviour within the last three years or if they or any member of their household is the subject of an Anti Social Behaviour Order they may be allocated a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy (SSAT).

No response to letters

When allocating a house we obtain a short list of applicants from the Edindex common housing register we invite these applicants to attend an application and/or membership interview. If there is no response to this letter their application will be by-passed. If the applicant has been awarded Silver priority and fails to keep an appointment this information will be passed to their Homeless Officer.

False information

When an applicant has given fraudulent or false information their application will be suspended for six months. The applicant will be informed and given the right to appeal. If the false information is discovered after a tenancy agreement has been signed, then legal action will be taken to recover the tenancy.

8. Allocation procedure

We allocate our houses and flats to applicants from the

a) Edindex common housing register

and

b) our own transfer list

a) Edindex common housing list

Once the Co-op receives the short list of applicants who have noted an interest we normally choose the applicant at the top of the list. However, we reserve the right to take into consideration other factors such as the type of property and the mix of Tenants already living in the close vicinity. We may occasionally under-occupy a home but we will never over-crowd a home. All allocations decision are recorded and approved by both our Housing Officers and if the applicant at the top of the list is not chosen, an explanation must be recorded and reported to our Management Committee.

b) Transfer list

One of the Co-op's main aims is to create a stable community and one way we aim to achieve this is by adopting a Transfer policy, which meets the changing needs and/or aspirations of Co-op Tenant/Members. Therefore, when a main door house or a ground floor flat becomes vacant we will, in the first instance, consider applicants who have applied to our Transfer list. This allows us to give Tenant/Members whose circumstances have changed a chance to remain a Co-op Tenant and to find a suitable Co-op house for perhaps their medical needs, or because their family size has increased. This policy also allows the Co-op to meet the aspirations of Tenant/Members who currently live in a stair and who wish a main door house with a garden.

9. Offer of accommodation

The offer of a house or flat will be made in writing and will include the size, type of heating, rent charge and a request to confirm interest in the offer. We expect the applicant to view the house and if accepting the offer to sign a tenancy agreement within three working days.

Failure to respond to our letters will result in the offer being withdrawn.

10. Monitoring and improving this policy

Targets

Specific and challenging, but achievable, targets will be agreed which will help the Co-op meet both our overall objectives and the specific allocation policy objectives. Some of the targets, for example: for the time taken to process forms and the ethnicity of applicants registered with Edindex, will be set, and produced by Edindex.

In March, the Management Committee reviews the Co-op's performance by considering how well the Co-op has performed against the agreed targets. The Management Committee will then compare the Co-op's performance or achievements with other Scottish public sector landlords. To do this we will consult the Annual Statistical Report published by the Scottish Executive and the annual report published by the Scottish Housing Best Value Network Group. (The Co-op is a Member of this group)

Monitoring performance

The staff record statistics monthly and the Management Committee is given a report, (known as the Key Performance Indicator Report or KPI report), at every committee meeting. This report contains the Co-op's targets and achievements. When we fail to meet a target, the staff will provide an explanation and a strategy for getting back on course.

Listening to applicants and Tenant/Members

Complaints received from applicants and satisfaction survey results about the allocation policy will be included in the KPI report and will be used to make improvements to the allocation policy.

Annual review

The Co-op is a small organisation with a simple organisational or governance structure and a simple staff structure. Therefore, improvements can be made to procedures and policies relatively quickly and without the need for expensive organisational changes. Improvements are therefore made to the allocation policy as and when required. We will however also formally review this process at least annually. This review will give the Co-op an opportunity to consider current best practice, the procedures adopted by other landlords, and to organise a survey or focus group to find out the opinions of the Co-op's Tenant/Members.

Internal audit

The Co-op employs an external agent to carry out a regular audit of the services we provide and the policies and procedures we follow. This audit

specifically checks that the Co-op is acting within the law and within the regulations set by the Scottish Executive. This audit also checks that we are following our own rules, policies and procedures. The audit of the allocation policy is part of the Housing Management Service audit, which takes place every three years.

Equal opportunities strategy

The Co-op records statistics about race, gender, age, and disability and we carry out an annual equal opportunities impact survey, which is reported to the Management Committee.

Informing Co-op Members

At least twice a year the Co-op will let Co-op Tenant/Members know the effectiveness of the allocation policy. As well as including information about this process in our quarterly newsletter, Scoop, we will include detailed information in our Annual Report.

11 Complaints and appeals

Our Complaints and Appeals policies are available from the Co-op office.

We encourage Co-op Tenant/Members and applicants



who believe the Co-op has not dealt with their application properly or



who disagree with a decision we have made or



if they believe staff have not acted in a professional and sympathetic manner

to contact the Co-op Director or the Co-op Chairperson.

We will consider all complaints seriously.