

LARKFIELD HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED

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ALLOCATIONS*Notes*

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1.0 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

1.1 Larkfield Housing Association is committed to providing housing on the basis of need. We are also committed to a policy of equal opportunities to ensure that all group and individuals have equal access to our housing and that they are treated equally when they become tenants. The Association's work is largely targeted towards providing attractive rented housing in the Larkfield area and we aim to complement the work of other local housing providers of operation.

1.2 The principal aim of this allocations policy is to ensure the allocation of satisfactory housing to those with a clear and identifiable need at rents they can afford. In formulating this policy the Association has taken into account guidelines issued by Communities Scotland, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and the Chartered Institute of Housing, as well as all relevant legislation, including the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

1.3 Our particular objectives for the allocations policy are as follows.

- * *To meet needs*, by providing a policy which responds to a wide range of different types of need.
- * *To make best use of the housing stock*, by matching our housing to those whose needs it best meets.
- * *To promote a stable community* within Larkfield through an allocations policy which seeks to achieve a long and lasting let and the successful integration of the incoming household within the local community.
- * *To monitor and publicise performance*, so that the Association and the local community are aware of our activities and can comment on or question our performance.
- * *To provide a cost effective allocations function*, so that tenants are satisfied that their rents are being put to good use.

1.4 This policy document can be produced in Braille, audio tape and other language formats on request.

2.0 APPROACH

2.1 In allocating our houses, the Association aims to meet the following principles.

- * *Consistency*, by treating applicants with similar characteristics in a similar manner.

- * *Openness*, by providing meaningful information about our policy and the way in which we let our houses.
 - * *Accountability*, by giving account of our actions and listening to the views of others, including applicants, about the way in which we let our houses.
 - * *Responsiveness*, to individual circumstances and recognising the personal, individual nature of the service.
 - * *Completeness*, providing applicants with a full picture of their rehousing opportunities from the Association and other local housing providers.
 - * *Co-operation*, promoting partnership working with other local housing providers and other organisations to offer the best re-housing opportunities to applicants and alleviate housing need.
 - * *Equal opportunities*, not discriminating between applicants on the grounds of race, colour, culture, ethnic or national origin, religion, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, family circumstances or marital status.
 - * *Confidentiality*, providing wherever possible confidentiality to the personal circumstances of individual applicants.
 - * *Applicants Rights*, The Association recognise applicants rights via our points system to a life free from violence, harassment and abuse, be it Domestic, Racial or otherwise.
- 2.2 The Association recognises the advantages of the development of a locally based Common Housing Register as providing a common point of access to a number of landlords and reducing the complexity of completing many different application forms to gain access to housing lists.
- 2.3 The Association operates a Joint Housing Application with Oaktree Housing Association and Cloch Housing Association and in order that applicants only require to complete one housing application to gain access to the housing lists of the three housing associations. Applications will then be assessed by each Association under their individual Allocations Policy.
- 2.4 The Association is working in partnership with other local housing providers in Inverclyde to develop a Common Housing Register.
- 3.0 WHO CAN APPLY**
- 3.1 Applications will be accepted from anyone over the age of 16. The Association wishes to encourage all those with a housing need to apply by completing an application form.

3.2 Larkfield Housing Association accepts referrals from Inverclyde Council's Homeless Department under arrangements of Section 5 of the Housing Scotland Act 2001 and from other voluntary providers such as Women's Aid.

4.0 HOUSING LISTS

4.1 Housing Lists The Association has both general waiting lists and transfer lists.

* General List: this will be open to those over the age of 16 years in housing need who are not currently tenants of Larkfield Housing Association.

* Transfer List: this will be open to existing tenants of Larkfield Housing Association who are in housing need and seeking to apply for a move to other rented housing owned by Larkfield Housing Association.

4.2 Quota System The Association operates a quota system for allocations from different lists. The proposed quota will be:

General waiting list	60%
Transfer list	15%
Homeless S5 referrals	15%
Medical /Other special needs	10%

This system means that all types of applicants will have an opportunity to obtain housing with Larkfield Housing Association.

4.3 Priorities Larkfield will operate a points system of allocation both for the general waiting list and transfer applicants. The types of need which will be taken into account and given points are as follows:

Category A	Security of Present Accommodation
Category B	Overcrowding, Underoccupation and Large Families
Category C	Unsatisfactory Housing Conditions

Category D

Medical Needs

Category E

Environmental or Social Factors

4.4 The Association operates a computerised housing applications package, recording full details of an application which has been assessed and accepted. The system records, and cross references, applicants' details, the size and type of house, and the locations where housing is being sought. For a vacancy, the system will produce a list of applicants in order of priority as indicated by the number of points awarded.

4.5 Choice Larkfield is one compact area and any requests made with regards to house size, house type and location will be given every consideration. Applicants will be advised of the type of housing available within the locations preferred.

4.6 House Sizes Applicants will be eligible to apply for a house size which matches their needs, according to the Association's policy. This is as follows:

- * one double bedroom (two persons) cohabiting couple/named single person;
- * one single bedroom for each member of the family over 16 years of age;
- * one single bedroom for each single dependant child outwith the categories listed below;
- * one double bedroom for each pair of children of the same sex over the age of 10, but under the age of 16;
- * one double bedroom for each pair of children regardless of sex under the age of 10;
- * maximum of two persons to each bedroom;
- * living room to be excluded from the calculations of the number of bedrooms in present accommodation.

In exceptional circumstances the Association will agree to applicants applying for properties which are larger than required. Where no applicants remain on the 4 apartment waiting list, the Association reserves the right to approach the applicant(s) from the 3 apartment list to offer the larger property, to help address housing need.

The Association also reserves the right to agree to applicants applying for properties which are larger than normally required (normally by one extra bedroom) in cases where the applicant has confirmed joint custody/access visiting rights to children or others to be exercised.

In exceptional circumstances the Association will agree to applicants applying for properties which are smaller than required. Where an applicant is assessed as in high priority need (eg applicants fleeing continuous harassment/domestic abuse) and the Association cannot reasonably meet that housing need in the short term due to limitations in its type of housing stock, the Association reserves the right to offer that applicant a smaller property (normally by one bedroom short) of the required size of property under normal policy.

The Association may also agree to applicants applying for properties which are smaller than required (normally by one bedroom) for cases in which applicants require a minimum of a 5 apt property, due to limitations in this particular type of housing stock.

- 4.7 Review of 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 Association of any changes in circumstances as these occur. Applicants who do not respond to the letter within 21 days will normally have their application cancelled.

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF HOUSING NEEDS

- 5.1 An application must be made on the Association's application form and help is available to anyone who has difficulty completing the form. This includes providing a sign or language interpreter as required, or any other representative requested. Incomplete applications are followed up by letter or telephone to ensure that all applicants receive equal consideration. Where an applicant seeks re-housing on medical or health grounds, he/she will be required to complete a medical application form.
- 5.2 The Association will accept applications from any person seeking housing. However only those applications assessed as in housing need, in accordance with the Association's Allocations Policy will be added to the Association's Active Housing Lists. Applicants will receive a letter explaining whether they qualify for entry to the active housing lists and their prospects of obtaining re-housing with the Association. If an applicant is unsuccessful their application will remain logged in an inactive housing list and if their circumstances change at a future date they should notify the Association immediately in order that their application can be reassessed.

6.0 HOMELESSNESS

- 6.1 The Association and Inverclyde Council have agreed a protocol for housing homeless applicants which aims to provide a sound basis for positive

partnership working between Inverclyde Council and the Association in relation to the alleviation of homelessness and to best address housing need within Inverclyde.

- 6.2 The protocol will ensure the effective operation of the legislative Duty on the Association to comply with requests from the local authority to re-house homeless households, in accordance with Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

7.0 ALLOCATION OF TENANCIES

- 7.1 Refusal of Offer of Tenancy No penalty will attach to a decision by an applicant to refuse an offer of housing, providing there are clear and reasonable grounds for refusing the offer. If the reason for refusal is such that the Association considers it will be unlikely to meet the aspirations of the applicant, then the applicant may be advised to cancel the application.

- 7.2 Previous Tenancies Where an applicant has a current tenancy, or has previously held a tenancy, the Association will contact the present or previous landlord to investigate whether the tenancy has been conducted satisfactorily (this will cover a five year period). Rent arrears or other tenancy related debts will not be taken into account when the debt is less than one month's rent; or when the applicant :

- has agreed an arrangement for paying the outstanding debt; and
- has maintained the arrangement continuously for a minimum period of three months; and
- is continuing to make payments.

- 7.3 A recent history of anti-social behaviour will be taken into account when assessing the Association's response to any application, though it will not necessarily prevent the applicant being rehoused by the Association. The applicant, will however, require to satisfy the Association staff that despite the problems he/she has experienced in the past he/she will work with the Association and other appropriate agencies in developing a sound tenancy.

- 7.4 False Information Applicants are required to declare on their application form that all information supplied is true and are asked to take care to submit accurate information about their circumstances. Should it come to the Association's attention that false or misleading information has been given, or information withheld in order to obtain a tenancy, the application will be cancelled and action will be taken to recover possession of any property for which a tenancy has been granted.

- 7.5 Verification Applicants will be visited prior to any offer of housing to verify the accuracy of their application form details. The Association may need to investigate/confirm certain information given. An applicant may therefore be asked to produce evidence to e.g. confirm residence or confirm

other details when the application is first processed or at a later stage where appropriate. If an applicant cannot produce satisfactory items of verification within a reasonable timescale their application may be logged in the inactive housing lists and/or any offer of re-housing withdrawn.

- 7.6 Risk Assessment There may be limited occasions where the Association need to undertake a Risk Assessment before an application can be assessed. Serious social or relationship issues may need to be defined in the context of prospective rehousing to ensure the community are protected from any inappropriate allocation e.g. abuse of children, domestic violence etc. If permission to proceed with this assessment is refused, this will constitute grounds to cancel/ suspend an application.
- 7.7 Support Needs Assessment of support needs may be necessary before the Association formally makes an offer of accommodation, for example where Social Work support is necessary. Any such care or support packages will be defined before any formal offer is made.
- 7.8 Threatening or Violent Behaviour Threatening or Violent behaviour towards staff during the Housing Application process may constitute grounds to cancel/ suspend an application.
- 7.9 The Association allocates all properties in line with its Allocation Policy and no other factors are taken into account in this process. Under the terms of this policy the allocation of a property to a member of the Staff or Committee is permissible under the terms of Schedule 7 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001:-

Note: Tenancies are considered to be benefits, so Part 1 of Schedule 7 prohibits most Associations from granting tenancies to employees, members of a governing body and close relatives of such people. The Association can in terms of **Exception 1** of the Schedule grant a tenancy, transfer a tenancy, mutual exchange, shared ownership agreement or dispose of a house to a relevant person providing that:

- a. they fully meet the published criteria by which the Association allocates housing, and
- b. the employee, former employee, governing body member or former governing body member has had no involvement in or influence over the process by which the Association allocated the tenancy or disposal in question.

8.0 SPECIAL CASES

- 8.1 In exceptional circumstances, there may be some applicants whose needs cannot adequately be met by the points systems. These cases will be where very high levels of need are demonstrated and as such will represent only a

very tiny proportion of the overall relets made by the Association.

8.2 Special cases will be considered and decided upon by Area-Manager as required.

8.3 Amendments required to the policy as a result of the Special Cases process will be considered and any appropriate changes made.

9.0 TRANSFERS AND EXCHANGES

Transfers

9.1 Conditions

(i) They will not be considered for transfer to a property which would result in overcrowding or under-occupation of that property.

(ii) The condition of the property will require to be suitable for immediate relet.

Exchanges

9.2 The Association encourages requests for exchanges with tenants of local authority, housing association or other landlords where this will improve the housing circumstances of both parties, in accordance with the Association's Mutual Exchange Policy. The Association operates a mutual exchange board and tenants interested in an exchange should contact the Association to arrange for their details to be displayed.

Like for Like Transfers

9.3 Like for like transfers will facilitate Larkfield tenants who do not have any housing need but have a desire to move to the same size of property within Larkfield.

1. Applications will be awarded 1 point and added to the Active Transfer List.

2. Applicants must indicate an interest in a particular property in writing to the office.

3. Applications will be held on the Active Transfer List in date of application and size order. Date of application will be used where multiple applications have been submitted to the office for the same house.

4. Like for Like transfers will be subject to a quota of lets which will be no more than 2 per annum and which will form part of the general Transfer quota.

5. The applicant will not be transferred to any vacant property where the

resultant vacancy cannot meet the housing needs of the next qualifying applicant on the priority waiting list.

6. Refusal of a like for like offer by a tenant will introduce a 2 year suspension of the application from the like for like waiting list.

- 9.4 The Association will work closely with other housing providers to seek solutions for dealing with emergency cases such as serious harassment, domestic abuse etc.

HOMES (Housing Organisations Mobility and Exchange Scheme)

- 9.5 The Association participates in the HOMES system to enable tenants to seek moves outside their local area. A leaflet providing further information relating to the HOMES system is available from reception on request.

10.0 ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND CONFIDENTIALITY

- 10.1 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.

- 10.2 Under the Data Protection Act 1998 an applicant has the right to see any information stored about him or her on computer. The Association will respond to any request to view the information held on computer, or to have sight of any personal records maintained by the Association in accordance with the Association's Openness and Confidentiality Policy.

- 10.3 The Association will comply with the Data Protection Act and will seek an applicant's written permission to be able to hold details on file regarding their application.

- 10.4 Each applicant will receive an information leaflet, outlining the main points of the Allocations Policy along with the application form.

- 10.5 A full copy of the Association's Allocations Policy can be viewed at the office or purchased from the office, at an administrative charge of £5.00.

- 10.6 The Association will advertise properties available for re-letting at the office and through its website to provide applicants with up to date information on properties available for re-let .

11.0 TIMESCALES

The Association is committed to registering each new applicant on the waiting list within 1 working day of receipt of their form and the applicant will be notified of the points they have received within 10 working days.

12.0 RIGHT OF APPEAL

- 12.1 Any applicant who wishes to query the assessment of their application by housing management staff may do so in the first instance with the Housing Officer. 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 Area Manager and thereafter to the Housing Management and Maintenance Sub Committee.
- 12.2 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 on the Association's complaints procedures with final right to complain to the Housing Association Ombudsman. Complaints or comments about the policy, as distinct from the procedures, should be directed in the first instance to the Area Manager and thereafter to the Committee of Management.

13.0 MONITORING AND REVIEW

- 13.1 It is the role of the Committee of Management, delegated to the Housing Management and Maintenance Sub Committee, to oversee the allocations functions of the Association. Its role can be defined as having responsibility for:
- * the formulation of the allocations policy;
 - * monitoring the policy and practice;
 - * ensuring standards are maintained and the Association meets Communities Scotland/SFHA performance standards;
 - * dealing with appeals and complaints.
- 13.2 The Association's Housing Management and Maintenance Committee will regularly monitor the effectiveness of this policy, through the presentation of regular reports on housing lists statistics and allocations made. In the first instance, this policy will be reviewed within six months and then on an annual basis to ensure it continues to meet its aims and objectives.

14.0 POINTS SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION

In order to ensure that the Association houses people whom it intends to house, and to handle the great diversity and large number of applicants a systematic method of ordering priority has to be established.

A points system is an essential tool in a computerised housing list system to permit the shortlisting of priority applicants. The applicant's circumstances are judged by giving points weighting their circumstances according to the Association's policy.

POINTS

CATEGORY A SECURITY OF PRESENT ACCOMMODATION**1 Threatened with Immediate Homelessness**

Closing/Demolition Orders	35
Notice to Quit served on short assured or other tenancy	35
Property being repossessed (including mortgage repossession)	35
Tied housing where applicant is within two months of being required to move	35
Forced sale of property, eg due to financial difficulties or marital break up	35
Temporary accommodation, institution, hostel, Women's Aid refuge, where date to leave within two months has been given	35
Bed and Breakfast, Hotel	35

2 Temporary Accommodation or Short Term Tenancies

Hostel, Hospital, Institution, Women's Aid Refuge	30
People leaving supported "half-way" housing including children's home or care	30
Tied housing where applicant is within six months of retirement or employment terminating	25
Short assured/lease (or other) tenancy of six months, not renewable	25

NOTE:

To be awarded these points, written confirmation will be required from solicitor, landlord or employer.

Applicants awarded points as "Threatened with Homelessness" will not be awarded further points under Categories B or C.

3 Insecure Tenancies

Tied housing where applicant is within one year of retirement or employment terminating	15
Lease of less than six months	10
Short tenancy/lease of more than six months, or renewable	4

4 Living with Relatives/Friends/Lodgings with no Tenancy Agreement

Applicant and family (previously living together) living apart due to lack of suitable housing	8
If applicant has had home of their own but returned to live with relatives or friends because of relationship break up/changes in circumstances	6

Applicant and family wish to form separate household (may or may not be currently living together)	6
Applicant wishes to set up separate household	4
<i>Additional points:</i> If applicant's household comprises parent(s) and dependent child(ren)	10

NOTE:

As some of these categories attract high level of points the Association will investigate the circumstances leading up to the applicant's present housing situation. If the applicant has given up accommodation which they could reasonably have continued to occupy, points may be withheld or reduced.

Points are given where the applicant has to share facilities with person(s) who are not part of their permanent household and to whom they are unrelated. They may also be awarded to an applicant living in the family home if the applicant's relationship with the family has broken down and is causing mental or physical stress.

**CATEGORY B OVERCROWDING / UNDEROCCUPATION /
LARGE FAMILIES**

For each bedroom short of the required number	10
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2. Underoccupation

For each bedroom in excess of requirements	10
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3. Large Families

The Association recognises that it may not be able to offer large families, assessed as requiring a minimum of a 5 apt property, suitable rehousing due to limitations in its type of stock. The Association does however acknowledge that such applicants may face severe overcrowding and will therefore work to resolve the housing needs of such applicants through new build, adaptation of existing properties and other options suited to the individual circumstances.

CATEGORY C: UNSATISFACTORY HOUSING CONDITIONS

1 Lacking Basic Amenities

No kitchen/cooking facilities	3
No inside toilet	10
No piped hot water supply	3
No bath or shower	3

2 State of Repair

	Essential	8
	Desirable	4
<u>c</u>	<u>Employment</u>	
	Moving to take up employment in the area	8
<u>d</u>	<u>Travelling Difficulties</u>	
	Current housing prohibits access/visiting rights to children or others to be exercised	6
	Applicants who need to be closer to place of work/ educational establishment or essential services, eg Day Centre	4
<u>e</u>	<u>Custody/Access to Children Restrictions</u>	
	Applicants those current housing prohibits access/visiting rights to children or others to be exercised.	6
NOTE:		
The Association may seek confirmation or support from social workers, doctors, employers, solicitors or other relevant persons prior to awarding points in the above categories.		
2	Environmental Factors	
a	Elderly persons unable to manage large (delete) garden	3
b	Applicant with child(ren) under 10 years living above 1st floor level	4
c	Pensioners (over 60) living alone above 1st floor level without use of a lift	3
3	Other Factors	
	Not covered by the above	3