

WESLO HOUSING MANAGEMENT Allocation Policy

Date	February 2009
Author	Housing Manager
Approved by	Operations Director
Review date	February 2011

Weslo Housing Management

Allocation Policy



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1. COMPANY INFORMATION

Weslo Housing Management Ltd, a company limited by guarantee with charitable status is a Registered Social Landlord operating in the Falkirk and West Lothian Council areas. Our registered office is in Bathgate with a local office in Bo'ness.

Weslo owns 1,700 properties in West Lothian and a further 450 in Bo'ness. We are also the estate manager to over 3,500 private owners who have acquired their properties through Right to Buy.

The Company was established in 1994 through a stock transfer of Scottish Homes' properties by former employees of the agency. These former employees are the Chief Executive, Operations and Finance Directors of Weslo who form the Management Team and uniquely sit on Weslo's Board.

2. BOARD STRUCTURE

The Board of twelve consists of the three Executive Directors, a Chairman, four Tenant Directors, two local authority representatives and two business people with housing related experience. The Board delegate the day to day running of the company to the Management Team and nearly 60 highly professional staff operating within the Executive Directorates.

3. COMPANY OBJECTIVES

- Provide affordable, good quality, rented housing suited to the requirements of the community thereby assisting West Lothian and Falkirk Council's in meeting the general housing needs of their areas.
- Exercise local control over the housing stock and enable tenants and employees to have a greater say in policies affecting their housing and its environment.
- Manage, maintain and develop the housing stock and its environment.
- Use the resources of the Company and other locally based groups to promote the economic development in the areas of its operation.
- Improve the management service for tenants and provide further options for improvement of their homes.
- Give tenants as much choice as possible in the services they receive.

4. HOW OUR HOUSES ARE LET

Our houses are let by nomination from West Lothian and Falkirk Council. To be allocated a Weslo property in any of the undernoted areas you must apply to either The West Lothian Housing Register (WLHR) or Falkirk Council.

West Lothian Council nominate applicants from the WLHR for Weslo vacancies in:

Addiebrownhill	Fauldhouse	Pumpherston
Addiewell	Kirknewton	Stoneyburn
Armadale	Linlithgow	Uphall (Crossgreen & Fivestanks)
Bathgate	Livingston	West Calder
Blackburn	Longridge	Whitburn
Broxburn	Mid Calder	Winchburgh
East Calder	Polbeth	

Falkirk Council nominate applicants from their waiting list for Weslo vacancies in Bo'ness and Falkirk.

5. COUNCIL NOMINATION

In order to be considered for nomination by West Lothian or Falkirk Council to Weslo for housing you require to make an application directly to The West Lothian Housing Register or Falkirk Council. Housing Application forms can be obtained by telephoning The West Lothian Housing Register on 01506 775000 or online at www.westlothian.gov.uk or Falkirk Council on 01506 778899 or online at www.falkirk.gov.uk or e-mail housing.boness@falkirk.gov.uk.

6. SELECTION

An applicant can choose a maximum of two house sizes to suit their family circumstances. If an applicant chooses more than one house size they will be offered housing of either size, whichever becomes available first. For example, a single person or a person applying jointly with someone, will be able to choose whether they wish to be considered for:

- A one bedroom property
- both one and two bedroom properties
- a two bedroom property

Where there are two children under 10 years of age, they will normally be expected to share a bedroom but can be listed for an additional bedroom if an applicant wishes. Two children under the age of 10 sharing a bedroom will not be considered as overcrowding.

A bedroom can be allocated to each person in an applicant's permanent household aged 10 years or over, if you wish, with the exception of couples who are living together and who would normally wish to share a bedroom.

In a situation where applicants are separated/divorced and the applicant has shared residency/parental responsibilities of any dependant then they will be allocated a property of the size most suitable to the needs of their household.

Weslo will take reasonable steps to verify information provided by an applicant in support of an application for a tenancy. Whilst not exhaustive, Weslo may ask the applicant to provide information such as:-

- An extract of a court decree conferring parental responsibilities and rights on the applicant
- A Certificate of Marriage
- An adoption order
- A letter from the child's GP
- A Section 4 agreement
- A letter from the child's school
- A letter from the applicant's solicitor

If it comes to the attention of Weslo that an applicant has provided false information about family circumstances in order to secure a tenancy, the tenancy will be terminated.

Minimum living standard is one bedroom for either:

- A couple/single person.
- Up to two children under 10 years
- All persons over 10 years of age should not be expected to share a bedroom, unless they choose to.

An applicant can choose from a wide range of property and heating types. However, certain property and heating types may not be available in applicants chosen communities. Selection of property and heating types will apply across all chosen communities. Advice on availability will be given to applicants on request.

7. MEDICAL PRIORITY

Applicants to the WLHR can apply for a Health and Health Need Assessment as part of their application for housing. Forms are available on request.

Where an appeal is in relation to a decision for a Health and Health Needs Assessment the applicant must appeal in writing to the WLHR, Allocations Manager within 14 days of receipt of the decision. The appeal will be passed to the independent Community Medicine Specialist for review.

The Community Medicine Specialist will review the application and will advise the applicant within 28 days if the appeal should be upheld or declined.

Applicants to Falkirk Council can complete a Medical Assessment Form for assessment by the Medical Assessor. The Medical Assessors decision is Final and there is no right of appeal.

8. ALLOCATION OF HOUSING

Weslo recognises that the allocation of void properties alone does not maximise best use of resources and only assists a percentage of applicants. In order to make best use of resources and meet the needs of applicants, Weslo will maximise options and choice through the mutual exchange process and matching applicants to void properties. Where applicants are re-housed via Weslo's mutual exchange matching process, the properties matched will be dealt with in accordance with the void procedure and repaired to a standard that meets Weslo's void standard requirements.

When a house becomes available for let a nomination will be requested from West Lothian or Falkirk Council. If a vacant property is identified as having major adaptations we shall endeavour to match the property with an applicant who will benefit from the adaptations.

Before a property can be offered to an applicant, a Housing Officer will arrange a home visit if you live within reasonable travelling distance of our office. The purpose of this is to:

- Confirm the applicants present housing circumstances are recorded correctly.
- Check the condition of house and garden.
- Establish the current status of their rent account.

If however you live outwith reasonable travelling distance we may undertake a telephone interview if possible and or obtain a landlord reference.

If after pointing the nominee in accordance with our Allocation Policy the Housing Officer finds that the applicants' circumstances have changed in such a way as to affect their points or the property type they are being considered for, or that the applicant is in breach of their Tenancy Agreement, the nomination will be returned to West Lothian or Falkirk Council to allow re-assessment.

9. FACTORS NOT TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

Factors, which will not be taken into account by Weslo when allocating housing are:

- Any outstanding liability (such as rent arrears) attributable to a house of which the applicant was not the tenant.
- Any rent or other arrears accrued by the applicant on a previous tenancy which are no longer outstanding.
- Any rent or other arrears which are outstanding but where:
 - the amount outstanding is not more than $\frac{1}{12}$ th of the annual amount payable (or which was payable) by the applicant to the landlord in respect of the tenancy (this refers to gross rent, not net rent); or
 - an applicant has agreed arrangements with the landlord for paying the outstanding liability and has kept this arrangement for a minimum of 3 months and is continuing to do so.
- Any outstanding debts which are not rent arrears or service charges.

10. OFFERS OF HOUSING

Weslo will issue an interim offer of housing as soon as they receive notification that a property is becoming available to let. A formal offer will be given once we have carried out a home visit where appropriate and obtained any supporting information e.g. current/former tenancy references. There will be no limit to the number of offers of housing that can be made to an applicant. If however, two offers have been declined, we shall contact the applicant in order to reassess their application and provide information on the availability of the type of accommodation requested.

In many cases, offers may be issued in advance of minor repairs being carried out to the vacant property. All allocated properties will meet Weslo's void standard.

Applicants will be able to view the property on offer and discuss any problems with the House Inspector. The House Inspector will carry out an accompanied viewing with all prospective tenants.

Upon receipt of an interim offer, an applicant is given 24 hours in which to confirm their interest to Weslo. If an applicant fails to reply to this interim offer within the 24 hours, Weslo will assume that the applicant is not interested in the property and this will be treated as a refusal of an offer.

All new tenancies between husband and wife, applicant and partner, two or more adults 16 years or over (outwith a family composition), will be offered joint tenancies. Applicants who include lodgers will be dealt with individually.

11. SUSPENSION

Weslo may suspend an applicant for an offer of housing if an applicant is found to be:

- In serious breach of their Tenancy Agreement; or
- Has been evicted as a result of a serious breach of their Tenancy Agreement. If suspended for any of these reasons the applicant will receive notification in writing from the Housing Officer.
- From a management perspective it may be inappropriate to house the applicant.

Examples of this are:-

- The applicant has current or former debt (see 'Factors not to be taken into account' for more detail).
- The applicant has kept their current or former house and garden in a poor condition; or
- The applicant has been guilty of causing a nuisance or annoyance to their neighbours; or
- The applicant has been convicted of a serious crime, such as the supply of illegal drugs.

When an applicant falls into any of the above categories they will be notified in writing the reason why they have been suspended. The applicant will be advised how long the suspension will last and how the suspension can be lifted.

12. ASSISTED MOVES

Situations can occur which cannot be dealt with adequately under the Allocation Policy. Examples are:

- Extreme neighbour problems where the only solution is to move one party.
- Extreme medical problems where the medical points granted do not give swift access to the type of property required.
- Serious harassment.
- Care in the Community.
- Witness Protection (anything that falls into this category must be dealt with in conjunction with the Housing Manager).
- Regeneration (major works i.e. demolition).
- Extended families seeking to live together in one property where the minimum space standard cannot be met.

Assisted moves should only to be used in extreme cases and not to allow applicants who are in similar circumstances to others to be housed ahead of others. Each case will be assessed on an individual basis and approved by the Housing Manager.

13. LOCAL LETTINGS INITIATIVE

Weslo supports the principal of a local lettings initiative as a means of ensuring balanced and sustainable communities. The Allocation Policy will take into consideration, the Scottish Executive objectives for communities.

- Delivering good quality, sustainable and affordable housing for everyone.
- Regenerating our communities. Building safer communities by tackling anti-social behaviour.
- Tackling poverty and helping vulnerable people.
- Promoting equal opportunities and active citizenship.
- Open/improved access to affordable rented housing within communities to people.
- Promotion of stability and sustainability within communities.
- Maximisation of resources including working in partnership with others through review of allocation policies and nomination agreements to ensure compatibility and optimum choice for applicants.
- Assessment of the needs of people, communities and local priorities.

Weslo recognises that we cannot work in isolation therefore to be most effective it must be undertaken in conjunction with a range of inter-related policies and proposals contained within other plans and strategies being undertaken by Weslo and its partners.

14. MUTUAL EXCHANGES

If you are a Weslo tenant you may be able to exchange your home by agreement with another Weslo tenant or with a tenant of a housing provider elsewhere. An application form for a mutual exchange can be obtained from our offices at 66 North Bridge Street, Bathgate or 15 North Street, Bo'ness telephone 01506 639138 or 01506 639102. You can also have your home photographed by Weslo and made available for the public to view in our office. Please note that written permission must be given by Weslo before any exchange can take place.

Applicants are also able to obtain information regarding other exchanges on-line at www.weslo-housing.org

Upon receipt of a mutual exchange application the Housing Officer will:

- Check to establish that both exchange partners are current Weslo tenant(s). If not, write to the other landlord to establish whether there are any reasonable grounds for refusing to give consent. Write to the Weslo tenant to keep them informed. If there are reasonable grounds for refusing consent, then refuse request for exchange and write to both tenants.
- Undertake home visit and tenancy checks, where a Weslo tenant(s), remind tenant that the property will be assessed in accordance with Weslo's void standard.
- If visit/checks are not satisfactory, refuse request and advise both tenants in writing.
- Check that exchange requests satisfy both tenants housing need. If not, refuse request and advise both tenants in writing.

Weslo should make a decision about a mutual exchange, provided they have all the relevant information within one month of receipt of the mutual exchange request.

If a mutual exchange is refused and applicants do not agree with Weslo's decision they can appeal in writing to the Housing Manager. The Housing Manager will aim to advise the applicant of their decision with 5 working days.

15. HOMELESSNESS

We aim to address the need of all applicants who find themselves homeless, which we define as follows:

- Applicants who have been classed as being 'statutory homeless' by West Lothian or Falkirk Council.

or

- Applicants who have no fixed address (sleeping rough) or who are at present living in accommodation lacking amenities i.e. non static caravan, tent or car.

Threatened with Homelessness is defined as follows:

Notice served on another tenancy or a lease not being renewed;
House sale pending (with date known);
Property being repossessed (with date known);
Applicants made homeless because of a relationship breakdown;
Applicants living in temporary accommodation e.g. accommodation for homeless person's Women's Aid Refuge, bed and breakfast;
Applicants living with relatives, friends or lodgings with no tenancy agreement.
Tied Tenant (forced to leave)
Leaving HM Forces

Proof of applicant's circumstances will be required, where relevant.

Weslo accepts referrals of homeless persons under Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

16. DEMOLITION, CLOSING, IMPROVEMENT NOTICES AND REDEVELOPMENT

If an applicant is forced to move because West Lothian or Falkirk Council served a demolition, closing or improvement notice on their home, they may be able to obtain temporary accommodation from Weslo.

Applicants who are provided with a temporary tenancy will be able to keep their application on the waiting list and the initial need points awarded will remain. If Weslo decide to redevelop a housing estate and it is necessary to re-house tenants either temporary or permanently, then such an allocation will take precedence over normal allocations.

17. CARE IN THE COMMUNITY

Weslo will assist West Lothian and Falkirk Council to achieve their Care in the Community objectives by entering into arrangements or agreements with voluntary or statutory organisations through which we will provide housing and the organisations will provide a variety of support arrangements to meet the particular needs of tenants, including support for young people who may be taking up a tenancy for the first time.

18. APPEALS PROCEDURE

If an applicant has a complaint about a decision made by Weslo in connection with their housing application they should, in the first instance write to the Housing Manager. Upon receipt we will acknowledge the complaint in writing or by e-mail within one working day. The Housing Manager will consider and aim to respond to the applicant within 5 working days.

If an applicant is still not satisfied with the reply they receive from the Housing Manager, they can submit an appeal in writing within 28 days to the Operations Director, who will consider the matter further. The Operations Director will advise the applicant of the outcome of their appeal within 10 working days.

If an applicant is still not satisfied they can appeal further to the full Board of Weslo by writing to the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive will advise the applicant in writing of the outcome of their appeal within 10 working days.

An applicant also has the right to approach the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. The address and telephone number to contact is as follows:

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
4 Melville Street
Edinburgh
EH3 7NS

Tel: 0800 377 7330
Fax: 0800 377 7331
Text: 07900 494372
e-mail: ask@spsso.org.uk
web: www.spsso.org.uk

19. REVIEW OF ALLOCATION POLICY

Weslo will review the operation and outcome of the Allocations Policy every 2 years.

20. HOUSING NEED POINTS

Housing Need points are awarded according to two factors:

- Homeless (Non cumulative) - fixed award of points
- General Need for Housing (Cumulative) – where more than one set of need points are added together.

POINTS FRAMEWORK EXPLAINED

<u>CATEGORY</u>	<u>POINTS</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
Homeless	400 350	Homeless Threatened with Homeless
General Needs HIGH	200	Medical Grade A, Overcrowding 3+, Sharing 3+, Poor Housing (below tolerable standards), Social Support (Harassment & Victims of abuse 1)
General Needs MEDIUM	150	Medical Grade B, Overcrowding 2, Sharing 2, Social Support (Harassment & Victims of abuse 2)
General Needs LOW	100	Overcrowding 1, Under-occupation, Unsuitable Accommodation, Sharing 1 Social Support, (Applications leaving care, Joint applicant's forced to live apart and to give or receive support), Insecurity
Attained Points	Varied	The use of waiting time points has been removed in line with legislative requirements. These points have been re-defined for existing applicants and will be treated as a protected points award effective from the introduction of the Allocation Policy.

HOMELESSNESS

Homeless points will be given if applicants are either Homeless or threatened with Homelessness as outlined on page 10 section 15. Applicants who are accepted by West Lothian Council as Homeless, unintentionally in Priority Need and with a Local Connection to West Lothian will also be accepted by Weslo.

GENERAL NEEDS (Cumulative Points System)

The cumulative points system recognises all housing need factors.

Applicants will be assessed on their housing needs and awarded points accordingly.

Where an applicant demonstrates that they are eligible for more than one of the General Housing Need Points Categories regardless of High, Medium and Low Priority then these points will be added together to maximise their final points award.

GENERAL NEEDS HIGH – POINTS AWARD 200

Points will be awarded when an applicant matches any one or more of the needs circumstances within the High Needs Category.

GENERAL NEEDS MEDIUM – POINTS AWARD 150

Points will be awarded when an applicant matches any one or more of the needs circumstances within the Medium Needs Category.

GENERAL NEEDS LOW – POINTS AWARD 100

Points will be awarded when an applicant matches any one or more of the needs circumstances within the Low Needs Category.

GENERAL NEEDS POINTS – HIGH

MEDICAL PRIORITY GRADE A – POINTS AWARD 200

Where a medical assessment indicates high medical need and the applicant's current housing is unsuitable for their medical requirements.

OVERCROWDING 3+ POINTS AWARD 200

Applicants will receive points if they need additional bedrooms because their present accommodation does not meet the minimum living standard set by Weslo.

Minimum living standard is one bedroom for either:

- a couple/single person
- up to two children under 10 years
- all persons over 10 years of age should not be expected to share a bedroom, unless they choose to

Overcrowding in the high needs category will be awarded when an applicant demonstrates that three or more bedrooms are required.

SHARING 3+ POINTS AWARD 200

Applicants will receive points where there are 3 or more people sharing one or more of the following facilities with anyone other than those included in their application.

- Livingroom
- Kitchen
- Toilet
- Bathroom

POOR HOUSING CONDITIONS (BELOW TOLERABLE STANDARDS) – POINTS AWARD 200

An applicant may also receive points if their present accommodation is in an extremely poor state of repair, or if it lacks basic services or amenities. Weslo will assess whether the present housing is sub-standard and will award points according to the poor-housing category. An Environmental Health report will be required as confirmation of poor housing prior to points being awarded.

Poor Housing Points will be awarded where the present dwelling does not meet the tolerable standard for one or more of the following reasons:

- Structural instability
- Unsatisfactory supply of hot or cold water
- Deficient ventilation or natural lighting
- Unsatisfactory access to external doors
- Rising or penetrating damp
- Unsatisfactory cooking facilities
- Fixed bath or shower or wash hand basin at these facilities
- This does not include caravans or buildings which were not built for habitation

SOCIAL SUPPORT 1 – POINTS AWARD 200

Victims of Harassment 1

Applicants will be awarded points if they claim that they are suffering from harassment on the grounds of race, gender, sexuality, age, disability or beliefs, violence and unprovoked assault regardless if any doubt exists. If however, further investigations prove that the claim is unfounded the 200 points will be removed.

Victims of Domestic Abuse 1

An applicant will be awarded points for domestic abuse, regardless if any doubt, where they claim that they are living with a violent partner.

WESLO'S DEFINITION OF ABUSE IS:

- physical abuse (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour)
- sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate a person and are perpetrated against their will, including rape)
- mental and emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family and friends)

GENERAL NEEDS POINTS – MEDIUM

MEDICAL PRIORITY GRADE B – POINTS AWARD 150

Where a medical assessment indicates a medium medical need and the applicant's current housing is unsuitable for their medical requirements.

OVERCROWDING 2 – POINTS AWARD 150

Applicants will receive points if they need additional bedrooms, if their present accommodation does not meet the minimum living standard set by Weslo.

Minimum living standard is one bedroom for either:

- a couple/single person
- up to two children under 10 years
- all persons over 10 years of age should not be expected to share a bedroom, unless they choose to

Overcrowding in the medium needs category will be awarded when an applicant demonstrates that two or more bedrooms are required.

SHARING 2 - POINTS AWARD 150

Applicants will receive points where there are two persons sharing one or more of the following facilities with anyone other than those included in their application.

- Livingroom
- Kitchen
- Toilet
- Bathroom

SOCIAL SUPPORT 1 – POINTS AWARD 150

Victims of Harassment 2

Applicants will be awarded points if they claim that they are suffering from harassment on the grounds of extreme behaviour including drug dealing, threatening and abusive behaviour, frequent serious disturbances and vandalism. If however, further investigations prove that the claim is unfounded the points will be removed.

Victims of Domestic Abuse 2

An applicant will be awarded points for domestic abuse, regardless if any doubt exists.

When they claim that they have been forced to move because of violence and further claim that they continue to be pursued.

GENERAL NEEDS POINTS – LOW

OVERCROWDING 1 – POINTS AWARD 100

Applicants will receive points if they need additional bedrooms if their present accommodation does not meet the living standard set by Weslo.

Minimum living standard is one bedroom for either:

- a couple/single person
- up to two children under 10 years
- all persons over 10 years of age should not be expected to share a bedroom, unless they choose to.

Overcrowding in the low needs category will be awarded when an applicant demonstrates that one additional bedroom is required.

UNDEROCCUPATION – POINTS AWARD 100

Applicants will receive points if their present accommodation is too large for their needs and exceeds their minimum living standard set by Weslo.

Minimum living standard is one bedroom for either:

- a couple/single person
- up to two children under 10 years
- all persons over 10 years of age should not be expected to share a bedroom, unless they choose to

UNSUITABLE ACCOMMODATION – POINTS AWARD 100

Weslo will view people who live in upper flats, with a common stairwell, as living in unsuitable accommodation if:

- There is one child less than 10 years old in the household

These points will not be awarded to people who are prepared to accept an offer of the same type of accommodation.

SHARING 1 – POINTS AWARD 100

Applicants will receive points where there is one person sharing one or more of the following facilities with anyone other than those included in their application.

- Livingroom
- Kitchen
- Toilet
- Bathroom

INSECURITY OF TENURE – Points Award 100

Where applicants existing tenure is insecure and they meet Weslo's definition of insecurity of tenure they will be awarded insecurity points.

Weslo's definition of insecurity of tenure is:

- Private let applicant been given notice to quit
- Owner Occupier forced to sell property e.g (property re-possessed/marital breakdown)
- Tied Tenant (forced to leave)
- Leaving HM Forces

These points will only be awarded upon receipt of written evidence from employer, solicitor, landlord or mortgage lender.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

LEAVING SOCIAL WORK CARE – POINTS AWARDED 100

Where it is confirmed that applicants will no longer have the security of residential Social Work Care, and a letter from Social Work confirms this, points will be awarded. (Applicants in this category may qualify for further points as a result of an assessment via West Lothian Throughcare/Aftercare and Youth Homeless team).

JOINT APPLICANTS/FAMILY LIVING APART – POINTS AWARDED 100

Where applicants and members of their family wish to live together as a couple or a family and:

- Have previously lived together as a couple/family unit and wish to continue to reside as the same couple or family unit
- Are currently forced to live at separate addresses

Weslo reserves the right to request evidence demonstrating that applicants have previously lived together as a couple/family unit i.e. joint occupancy of previous tenancy, owner occupation, private let which will advise of previous residency. Other proof sought may be utility bill, letter from GP etc.

GIVE OR RECEIVE SUPPORT 100

Where applicants need to move to give or receive support they will be awarded social support points. (These points will be awarded following outcome of a Health and Housing Needs Assessment).

ATTAINED POINTS – PROTECTED POINTS AWARD VARIABLE

The use of waiting time points has been removed in line with legislative requirements and these points have been redefined for existing applicants and will be treated as a protected points award, effective from the introduction of the Allocation Policy.