



ALLOCATIONS POLICY

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST	
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Approved by Director:	23 AUGUST 2023
Effective From:	30 AUGUST 2023
Date of Next Review:	AUGUST 2028
Diversity compliant:	YES
Equality Impact Assessment:	MEDIUM
Data Protection compliant:	YES
Health & Safety compliant:	YES
Procedure implemented:	YES
SDM system changes made:	N/A
Training Completed:	
Posted on Sharepoint:	
Posted on website:	

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ALLOCATIONS POLICY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This policy outlines Forgewood Housing Co-operative commitment to a fair, open and accountable and transparent allocations process which complies with the law and reflects regulatory and best practice requirements.

We aim to provide high quality, affordable and accessible social rented housing to those who need somewhere to live because they have no home or their current housing no longer suits their needs. This Policy is based on a clear framework where we prioritise people who are in the most need of housing.

The Co-operative along with North Lanarkshire Council and seven other registered social landlords are all partners in the North Lanarkshire Common Housing Register.

It underlines our commitment to working with the local authority and other partners to help prevent and alleviate homelessness. The Policy supports the Co-operative's commitment to allocating our homes in a fair and consistent way, so that available homes are let to those in the greatest housing need for those applicants wishing to be considered for housing with the Co-operative.

To facilitate this and to give guidance and clarification the Co-operative's Management Committee have approved Policies which incorporates Succession to Tenancy, Assignment and Sub-letting & Lodgers.

We are committed to treating everyone equally who applies for housing and make sure we keep to our Equality & Diversity Policy and provide every applicant with the same high quality level of service.

2.0 POLICY AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims and objectives of our allocations policy are to ensure we have a sustainable community, and to treat all of our applicants in a fair and consistent manner:

The aims and objectives of our allocations policy are to:-

- Address housing need;
- Give priority to those in greatest housing need;
- To assist the local authority in the prevention of homelessness;
- Make best use of our housing stock;
- Create and maintain a balanced and sustainable community;
- Work together with partners in North Lanarkshire with the Common Housing Register, ensuring maximisation of choice and access to housing applicants;
- Create a fair and transparent allocation system;
- To minimise suspensions;
- Providing affordable, attractive and housing to those in need;

- Promote equalities and diversity by avoiding discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex (gender) sexual orientation or marriage and civil partnership;
- Ensuring our policy and procedures on allocation of housing complies with legislative requirements and meets best practice;
- Ensure assistance and guidance is provided to all applicants in the allocation process so that they can make informed choices in relation to requesting specific stock type and areas;
- Minimise void rental loss by allocating empty properties as quickly as possible;
- Deal with appeals and complaints fairly and consistently.

3.0 LEGAL REQUIREMENTS, CHARTER AND GOOD PRACTICE

This policy recognises the best practice information that the Housing Regulator, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, the Chartered Institute of Housing, House Mark and the Scottish Housing Network have produced and shared. By following this best practice information, we have made sure we have created a policy that is fair.

It also meets the legal requirements of the following:-

- Equality Act 2010;
- Housing (Scotland) Act 2010;
- Housing (Scotland) Act 2006;
- The Civil Partnerships Act 2005;
- The Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003;
- The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001;
- The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000;
- The Human Rights Act 1998;
- General Data Protection Regulation;
- Data Protection Act 2018;
- The Access to Personal Information (Housing)(Scotland) Regulations 1993;
- The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987;
- The Matrimonial Homes (Family Protection) (Scotland) Act 1981;
- The Race Relations Act 1976;
- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975;
- Housing (Scotland) Act 2014;
- Management of Offenders etc. (Scotland) Act 2005 (Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements – MAPPA).

The Scottish Social Housing Charter sets the standards and outcomes that all social landlords should aim to achieve when performing their housing activities. The Co-operative will take account of and comply with the relevant outcomes contained within the Scottish Social Housing Charter as follows:-

Outcome 1: Equalities – Every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.

Outcome 2: Communication – Tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.

Outcome 7, 8 & 9: Housing Options – People looking for housing get information that helps them make informed choices and decisions about the range of housing options available to them;

Outcome 7, 8 & 9: Housing Options – Tenants and people on housing list can review their housing options;

Outcome 7, 8 & 9: Housing Options – People at risk of losing their homes get advice on preventing homelessness;

Outcome 10: Housing Options – People looking for housing find it easy to apply for the widest choice of social housing available and get the information they need on how the landlord allocates homes and their prospects of being housed.

Outcome 11: Tenancy Sustainment – Tenants get the information they need on how to obtain support to remain in their homes and ensure support is available, including services provided directly by the landlord and other organisations.

Outcome 12: Homeless People – Homeless people get prompt and easy access to help and advice, are provided with suitable good quality temporary or emergency accommodation when this is needed and are offered continuing support to help them get and keep the home they are entitled to.

4.0 COMMON HOUSING REGISTER

North Lanarkshire Council along with eight registered social landlords are all partners in the North Lanarkshire Common Housing Register.

We use the Common Housing Register (CHR) to maintain the waiting list for social rented housing in North Lanarkshire.

We work with our other partners in North Lanarkshire to simplify access to housing through the Common Housing Register (CHR). One single housing application form is completed, with the information held on the CHR and shared amongst housing providers who manage stock where the applicant wishes to be rehoused.

Seven of our partner landlords use the same Allocation Policy or pointing framework as the Co-operative, making the allocation process simpler to understand and meaning that an application to these partners only needs to be assessed once.

In doing this, the Co-operative and our partners can give joined-up housing information with good, accurate advice and information on choosing an area, types of housing available, and housing size required and about their housing options.

The aims of this policy are to allocate housing to those in greatest housing need. Each applicant's housing need will be assessed and given a points award in accordance with our points system.

Offers of housing will depend on the applicants:-

- level of priority they have;
- housing and support needs;
- the areas and the type of housing they want to be considered for;
- the type and sizes of housing that becomes available to let.

Sharing Information

Through partnership working with the local authority and others we will actively seek to encourage the development of stable and sustainable communities. By working within the framework of the CHR, NLC can obtain the following information:-

- collect, monitor the number of vacant houses, the turnover, the number of refusals, the reasons for the refusals, the household type and group being allocated houses;
- collect and monitor information on the number of transfer list applicants we have rehoused;
- collect and monitor information on the number of waiting list applicants we have housed;
- collect and monitor information on the number of homeless applicants we have housed;

This information can be used to:-

- feed directly into North Lanarkshire Council which will help with informing priorities for housing and other initiatives within the local authority area.

5.0 ACCESS TO HOUSING

Anyone 16 years and over can apply for housing unless they are subject to immigration control. They can apply on their own, jointly with a partner or jointly with anyone else who will be living with them.

Applications forms are available from any of the partner landlords of the common housing register or from the Co-operative to maximise choice and simplify access to housing. By filling in a single application form for the local authority area of choice, an applicant's information can be held on a Common Housing Register and applicants can be considered for housing through a range of providers.

Applicants must provide us with all of the information and any supporting evidence that we need to assess their housing application. It is also critical that applicants provide accurate information and advise us of all changes of circumstances that may affect their housing application.

We will carry out a rolling review of our housing list (where the Co-operative is Gatekeeper) so that applicants have their circumstances checked and updated routinely. Every 12 months we will issue a review letter to applicants, requesting confirmation of circumstances. If the applicant does not respond by the set date, a reminder letter will be issued.

If we fail to receive a response to this reminder letter we will remove the application form from the housing list. If an applicant who has been removed from the list contacts us at a future date, they can reapply to join our housing list.

Housing Choices

When applying for housing, an applicant can choose what type of property they want to live in and where they want to live. The size of house they might be offered is determined by the size and make up of their household. The house size eligibility rules are set out in this section.

When an applicant applies they can choose as many areas as they are interested in. This may increase their chances of being offered housing. They will always have the chance to change their choice of area or type of housing they have asked for if they want to.

Type of housing

Normally, an applicant can choose whatever type of house they want such as a house or a flat, however some kinds of housing are designed for a particular group of people. For example, housing for older people or ground floor properties are suitable for people with mobility problems. There are a smaller amount of these types of properties so we may not offer them to people who do not qualify for them.

If someone needs to move because of a health reason, we may limit the types of housing that we offer to them, this is to ensure the housing we offer them meets their health needs. For example, if we find their health would improve if they move to a ground floor property, they would only receive priority points for health for moving to this kind of property.

They could instead choose to apply for other types of property, but this would mean they would not receive priority points for their health.

We will not offer them housing that might make their housing situation worse.

Size of Properties applicants are entitled to

An applicant will be eligible for a particular size of house based on the size of their household. However, they may also choose to be on the waiting list for a house size smaller than they need. We will only allow them to do this where we do not have a supply of housing stock of the size they need.

As long as the size of house they request will not make them overcrowded in terms of housing law and as long as this will improve their current housing situation. This allows us to make the best use of the housing that becomes available and allows some flexibility.

- One or two bedrooms for a single person or a couple living in a property;
- One bedroom for a single parent or a couple with other people living with them. The other people living in this household would be entitled to;
 - one bedroom for every adult aged 16 or over (who is not part of a couple);
 - one bedroom for every two children of different sexes aged under 8; and
 - one bedroom for each child of different sexes aged between 8 and 16;
 - one bedroom for every two children of the same sex aged under 16;
- We do not expect more than 2 children to share a bedroom;
- We will give some priority to applicants where children of opposite sexes who are over a certain age have to share a bedroom (see above);
- We will not expect children to share a bedroom if there is an age difference of more than six years between them;
- We will take account of the size of the bedrooms in a house when deciding how many people it would be suitable for. We recognise that some bedrooms are smaller and they will only have enough space for one person. We will take this into account when working out points for overcrowding and when deciding what size of household we should offer the house to when it becomes empty;
- We will not award overcrowding points where the overcrowding is caused by temporary household members who will not form part of the household when they move;
- Couples and single people without children can choose whether they want us to consider them for either a one-or two-bedroom property. However when deciding what size of house they would like to be considered for applicants must remember if they select a house size larger than they need and they are in receipt of housing benefit or universal credit, the benefit they are entitled to may not cover the full rent charge for the property you are offered. The Housing Officer would discuss this in more detail with the applicant at the housing options interview.

Due to the low demand within the flats we will allow, on occasions, flexibility to applicants who live alone (single applicants) to apply for a 2 bedroom property. However, in the areas where there is higher demand we will ensure that when we allocate 2 bedroom properties, a household with children will normally be given priority over single applicants where the same number of points apply.

An applicant's time in need date (the date from which they had that level of need) as the next factor when deciding who we offer a property to. For example if an applicant has the exact same circumstances as another then the applicant in need longer will be given priority.

Below is an example of household size we will consider applicants for:-

Household size	Accommodation size
Single person	One or two bedroom property
Couple	One or two bedroom property
Single parent or couple with one child	Two bedroom property
Single parent or couple with two children of the same sex <i>If the children are both aged under 16</i>	Two bedroom property
<i>If the children are both aged under 16, but they have more than six years age difference between them</i>	Three bedroom property
<i>If one child or both children are aged 16 or over</i>	Three bedroom property
Single parent or couple with two children of the opposite sex	
<i>If the children are both aged under 8</i>	Two bedroom property
<i>If one child or both children are aged 8 or over</i>	Three bedroom property
Single parent or couple with three children	
<i>If two children are able to share a room (for example if they are aged under 16 years and are of the same sex, or aged under 8 and of opposite sex)</i>	Three bedroom property
<i>If no children are able to share a room (for example because they are all over 16 years of age)</i>	Four bedroom property
Single parent or couple with four children	
<i>If all children are able to share rooms</i>	Three bedroom property
<i>If two children are able to share a room</i>	Four bedroom property
<i>If no children are able to share a room</i>	Five bedroom property

Two households joining together

If two families want to give up their current homes and be rehoused in one larger home, we will award them points according to the points system using the following rules.

We will consider all extended family members (everybody who wants to live with the applicant as part of their new household) from the two households as being in one household. We will then compare the combined household with the size of the larger of the two properties that their household currently live in, to see if this property would be large enough for the new household to move into. If this property is not large enough, we will award points under the overcrowding criteria.

We will then assess the new household for any other points we should give them for their circumstances (for example, if they need to move for medical reasons or to be near services they need).

If both families wanting to move are our tenants, we will put their application in the 'Transfer' group. If only one or neither of the families are our tenants, they will be placed in the 'General' group.

6.0 PRIORITISING APPLICATIONS FOR HOUSING

Our policy for allocating housing is a “groups and points” system. This means when an applicant applies for housing we will assess their circumstances and decide which group they will fall into and award their points based on their housing need.

Groups

Homeless – This includes people who presented through North Lanarkshire Council’s homeless assessment process and it has been decided they are unintentionally homeless (homeless through no fault of their own) and they require housing urgently;

Transfer – This includes people who are our current tenants who need to move, for example their current home may be too big or too small or they require to move due to health reasons.

Aspirational Transfer – This separate group within the transfer group includes our current tenants or joint tenants, who do not have a housing need but wish to move to a different area or house type.

General Needs – This includes everyone else, for example someone who is renting from a private landlord or currently living with their parents.

The points system

When someone applies for housing, they receive a certain number of points based on their current housing circumstances.

We award points for seven main reasons:

- If they need to move home because of their health;
- If their housing situation is unsettled, for example, if they could soon become homeless or if their home is being demolished;
- If they are covered by an agreed protocol. This means we have an agreement with social work or health to give them priority for housing;
- If there are too many or too few people living in the applicant’s home;
- If their current living conditions are not suitable for them, for example, if their property is not suitable to live in because it is in a bad state of repair;
- If they are being abused or harassed;
- If they have social reasons for moving for example, if they need to move to be nearer to support they have from family or friends or from a specialist hospital or school.

These categories take into account the reasonable preference criteria set out in the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 as amended.

Within the points system, the applicant can usually receive points from each category that applies to them. For example, if they are moving so they can use services that they need, are in an overcrowded property and are being abused or harassed, they would receive points for all of these circumstances.

We will assess whether they qualify for these points using the guidelines detailed below.

7.0 HOUSING NEED CATEGORIES AND POINT AWARDED

The framework within the CHR will automatically award points as noted below, however in specific circumstances e.g. medical we can manually override.

Category	Points Awarded
If your housing situation is unsettled ('insecure housing')	
If your property is being demolished	150
If you have been assessed and accepted through an agreed council protocol. (A protocol means a set of rules that we and other organisations that provide support or a service for a particular group of people) i.e. If you have been accepted as prospective foster parents	150
If you have a definite date to lose your accommodation within two months. (For example, you have discharge papers to leave the armed forces or have been issued with legal documents to leave your accommodation within two months (for example, AT6 or Eviction Notice)	150
If you do not have any accommodation available for you and you are living outside or if you are living in temporary housing but you are not applying as homeless or you have been awarded a "homeless – non-priority" decision in terms of a homeless application you have made	80
If you have to move out of your current accommodation within two months	80
If you are living with people who are not going to be part of your household when you move	30
If your housing situation is unsettled for any other reason	10
<i>You will only receive one 'set' of points in the 'insecure housing' section</i>	
If you, or a member of your household, are being abused or harassed	
If you, or a member of your household, are being abused or harassed by someone in your home	150
If you, or a member of your household, are being abused or harassed by people who do not live in your home	50
<i>You will only receive one 'set' of points in the 'abuse and harassment' section</i>	
If you are moving for health reasons	
If you have an "urgent" health reason to move (for example, if you cannot leave hospital because your current property is no longer suitable for you and it would be dangerous if you returned home)	90
If you have a "serious" health reason to move (for example if you cannot get to the bathroom in your property and it would not be practical for the property to be adapted)	40
If you have any other health reason to move	10
<i>You will only receive one 'set' of points in the 'Health' section</i>	

Category	Points Awarded
If your housing situation is unsettled ('insecure housing')	
If your home has too many or too few people in it (Over and under occupancy). These points will be calculated taking into account the number of bedrooms in your home, the size of the bedrooms and the number of people these can accommodate	
If there are too many people living permanently or for most of the week in your home	50 for the first extra room you need and 10 for every other bedroom you need
If you have access to children who stay in your home for one or two nights a week and you need extra rooms	50
If you are overcrowded and because of this children of opposite sexes have to share a room	10
If there are too few people living in your home. (This only applies to our tenants who will be on the transfer list)	40
You can receive more than one 'set' of points in the 'over and under occupancy' section	
If your home is not suitable for you to live in	
If your property is significantly below the tolerable standard. (This means it falls below the standards set out in the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 as amended and is not in a good enough condition for you to live in (for example, if your property has no hot or cold running water, mains electricity or it is structurally unstable)	50
If your family have to live apart (for example if you do not have any housing available which is large enough for you all and you have to live in different homes)	20
<i>You can receive more than one 'set' of points in the 'Unsuitable housing' section</i>	
If you have a social reason for moving	
If you want to transfer to another home (this only applies to our tenants who will be tenants on the transfer and aspirational transfer lists)	20
If you want to move to give or receive support	10
If you want to move to access essential services that you need	10
If you are moving to enable you to get to your place of work	10
<i>You can receive more than one 'set' of points in the 'Social reason' section</i>	

Applicants leaving the Armed Forces

If an applicant is apply for housing as they are leaving the Armed Forces and losing the Force's accommodation we will prioritise their application using the criteria set out in our pointing framework. When they are issued with their discharge papers they should provide a copy of these to the Co-operative along with their application for housing and any other evidence that would be required to allow us to assess their level of housing need.

8.0 HEALTH AND HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

If the applicant feels their health is affected by their current housing circumstances, and that moving would help their health or reduce some of the problems they are experiencing as a result of their health they should complete a "Health and Housing Needs" form. This provides the Co-operative with information we need to assess how moving to one of our properties could help make things easier for them in terms of their health.

Medical points will only be awarded where re-housing would significantly improve the suitability of the applicant (or a member of the household who is moving with them) in light of their medical needs and only for accommodation which meets their medical requirements. Having a medical condition will not in itself be grounds for an award of medical points.

Applicants are required to keep us advised of any changes in circumstances, including details of any medical conditions that may affect their housing circumstances. Where there are changes in an applicant's medical circumstances our Housing Officer will make an assessment. Depending upon the findings their points entitlement may be increased, decreased or kept the same.

Where more than one person within the applicant's household to be re-housed has a medical condition, an assessment of the combined medical needs of their household will be carried out. It should be noted however that only one level of medical points will be awarded.

The Housing Officer will assess their medical circumstances and will decide on the level of medical award that you should be given to the applicant (or a member of their household who is moving with them). However, should there be a complex medical case this may require to be referred to the preferred landlord team for assessment.

There are three levels of medical priority:-

- Urgent health reasons; 90 points
- Serious health reasons; 40 points and
- Some health reasons 10 points

If the applicant (or a member of their household who is moving with them) has a health reason to move, it is likely that they will have specific property requirements which we will aim to meet.

Where the applicant has to be considered for a certain type of property or area (or a member of their moving household) for example ground floor level access, we will only award medical points or allow them to queue within the housing list, for preferences that meet their medical needs.

No points will be awarded for health reasons where it has been determined that: -

- The applicant (or a member of their household who is moving with them) have no medical problems that are due to their current accommodation; or
- The applicant (or a member of their household who is moving with them) have medical problems, but these would be unlikely to be alleviated to any extent by different accommodation.

9.0 HOW HOMES ARE ALLOCATED

Notification

We will write to applicants to notify them of their acceptance onto the Common Housing Register. At that time we will advise the applicant of any points entitlement and their application number. If we have suspended an application, we will write to the applicant and advise them of our decision and give the reasons for our decision. We will offer our help and support so that the applicant may make informed choices about their housing options.

Gathering supporting information

For us to properly assess the applicant's housing circumstances, we will need proof of their current circumstances.

Where appropriate and possible we will request confirmation of their circumstances direct from the third party who can provide this, however sometimes we may have to ask the applicant to supply this information.

We understand that sometimes the information we need may be personal and sensitive. In these cases, we will only need to see the sensitive documents we will not need to keep an original or take a photocopy.

Examples of the type of information we will require is listed on the table below:-

Applicant's circumstances	Proof we need to see
Whatever their circumstances	Two forms of identity. For example, we will accept a driving licence, a passport, an ID card that they were given when they started their job or their National Insurance card. If they do not have any of these but they have a different form of ID they are required to contact us to see if we can accept it.
If they are homeless or could soon become homeless	None – NLC will assess them through their homeless assessment to see if they meet the unintentionally homeless criteria as described in the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 as amended.

Applicant's circumstances	Proof we need to see
If they are leaving the armed forces or have been issued with legal documents to leave their current accommodation within two months	We will need to see their discharge papers, a valid AT6 or other legal document confirming their date to leave. When providing this information it must be the original documentation that is provided as copies of documents will not be accepted.
If they need rehousing because their health is affected by their current housing	None - we will assess their health and housing needs through our health and housing needs assessment process. If we need more information or advice about their health, we may contact their GP, consultant, other medical advisor or other people who may have information about their circumstances. We will only do this if we have their permission.
If they need a bigger home because they have access to their child and they want to stay overnight	Where possible we will obtain the birth certificate of the child/children they have access to and a letter from their child's other parent, or a letter from a lawyer explaining their access rights to their child or children.
They need to be near services they need.	Where possible we will obtain a letter from the service they use, such as a school or medical centre, explaining their reason for moving and that they need to live near this service.
If they need to provide or receive support.	Where possible we will obtain a letter / confirmation from the person receiving or providing support, explaining their reason for moving and that they need to be near them.
If they need to be closer to their place of work.	Where possible proof from their employer explaining their reason for moving and that they need to be near their place of work and / or proof of the workplace.

The Quota System

In order to maintain a balance between the various categories of lets, the Co-operative operates a quota system. However, in recognition of the Co-operative's commitment to its existing tenants, internal transfer applicants with an element of housing need will generally be considered for suitable housing which becomes available within the Co-operative's stock and will be assessed in line with the Allocation Policy.

In addition due to the low demand for our properties we will work with other landlords and agencies to assist them with any clients or groups that may require assistance with housing.

We will always check the homeless list as a priority group before others and will consider sensitive letting to ensure stability and avoid tenants with similar needs within the same area to prevent instability within a vulnerable community.

Our quota for homeless lets is 15% while this appears low it was set in previous years after consultation with North Lanarkshire Council, recognising the complexities of the area we operate.

Target percentages within the categories are as follows:

➤ General list applicants	55%
➤ Co-operative Transfer List Applicants	25%
➤ Homeless Waiting List	15%
➤ Co-operative Aspirational Transfer list applicants	5%

The percentages outlined in the quotas are not absolute figures which must be attained. They are however an indicative percentage to help ensure there is some balance when lets are made.

In calculating the quota we have taken into consideration existing tenants as we want to achieve a sustainable and balanced community where people wish to live and continue to remain living.

Property Matching

When we know that a property will soon become available, the Housing Officer will start to decide who the property is most suitable for.

Firstly, they will decide which group the property should be offered to, such as homeless, transfer, aspirational transfer or general group. We have set out targets for allocations to each grouping which helps us make these decisions and ensure where possible that all our groups have equal access.

We will then identify all of the applicants in this group whose needs, preferences and suitability match the property and surrounding area to ensure sustainability. We would then offer the property to the most suitable person with the highest number of points.

There are a number of exceptions to this, two of the main exceptions are:-

- **Adapted properties** – We want to make sure that we make best use of our adapted properties. We will check whether any of the people in the group we choose need an adapted property, if an applicant does meet this criteria, we will offer it to the person who needs the adapted property, with the highest number of points.
- **Ground floor property** – This type of property is deemed particularly suitable for people with medical or mobility needs. We want to make sure that we make best use of our suitable ground floor accommodation for those applicants who have been awarded health points. We will check the applicant has health points and that a move to this property would help alleviate some of their existing problems in respect of their living arrangements and health circumstances.

Using discretion and sensitive letting

In the interest of achieving balanced and sustainable communities and making the best use of housing stock, the process of matching applicants to properties will require a level of discretion in order to:-

- Match people with appropriate properties – for example to ensure that physical mobility needs are met and adapted properties are allocated appropriately. This will include mainstream properties that have been adapted to meet the needs of a previous tenant, for example through the adaption of a bathroom;
- House people in appropriate locations;
- Avoid potential clash of lifestyle – based on analysis of the circumstances of individual applicants rather than generalisations;
- Avoid over concentration of household type – for example avoiding high levels of child density or unduly high proportion of vulnerable people in one area, street or close;
- Ensure where possible the quotas are achieved between the four lists – for example, discretion has to be exercised in deciding which list to allocate a vacancy from.

Verification of Applications

All applicants will be contacted by the Co-operative and where possible visited prior to an offer of housing being made. The purpose is to verify the information submitted in the application and to provide any housing information and advice.

If the applicant's circumstances does not match the information provided in the application, then it will be reassessed. This may result in a change in points that are awarded or the list the applicant is placed. If the applicant fails to make contact following a request, this may affect any offers made. Where it is not geographically possible to carry out a home visit a reference from the tenant's landlord will be obtained.

Tenancy References

When someone applies for housing, we will ask them for the contact details of any landlords they have had over the past five years.

Before we consider an applicant for an offer of housing, we must be satisfied that the information provided in the tenancy reference confirms that the applicant satisfies our eligibility criteria. We will therefore seek tenancy references from the appropriate landlords.

For those applicants that have held tenancies with landlord's outwith the partner landlords of the Common Housing Register we will send a copy of a signed mandate confirming they are happy for us to write to any current or previous landlords for a tenancy reference.

We will not make an offer of housing if we are not satisfied with any of the tenancy references that we receive. We will suspend the application and monitor the case for improvement, e.g. in terms of rent arrears, anti-social behaviour, tenancy breaches, etc. (see Section 14.0).

10.0 OFFERS AND REFUSALS

Offers

The Co-operative wants to make sure that we match the applicant with a property that is suitable for them. We will support them in making their housing choices in terms of where they are thinking of living and what type of housing they need. We will tell them what their realistic chances are of being offered housing in their preferred areas.

As a result of this, we will already have very good information about the type of house they are interested in which should help minimise the refusals to housing offers. This is because our offers of housing should match the choices the applicant made when they applied.

After viewing the property we have offered we would ask the applicant to advise us within 24 hours if they are going to accept our offer.

If they accept our offer, we will officially sign the applicant up as a tenant. If they made a joint tenant application, they will have a joint tenancy and both must be present when asked to sign their tenancy.

We will give advice, information and support throughout the process of applying for, viewing and accepting the property and becoming our tenant(s). We will clearly explain their rights and responsibilities under the tenancy agreement before they sign.

Refusals

The Co-operative will not restrict the number of offers an applicant may receive but would expect that after two offers deemed reasonable by the Co-operative are refused, that housing options guidance is provided and other options are considered such as alternative areas, house types and landlords.

11.0 HOMELESSNESS

We aim to try and prevent homeless situations before they arise. We are committed to providing the applicant with the best housing and support options available to help them make informed choices and decisions about what is the right option for them to meet their housing needs.

After reviewing their housing options they may decide the best option for them is to apply under the homeless assessment procedure which they can do by applying directly to North Lanarkshire Council and ask to be assessed under their homeless assessment process. They have the legal duty to assess homeless applications and to provide or otherwise obtain housing for statutory homeless people.

If the Council assesses their application and finds they are unintentionally homeless and in priority need (which means they are homeless through no fault of their own and are vulnerable), they will put them into the homeless group within the North Lanarkshire Common Housing Register.

The Co-operative will consider offering housing to statutory homeless households should a suitable property becomes available for let.

However, we also recognise there are a number of definitions and degrees of homelessness, with some situations being regarded as more serious than others, which, therefore, place that household in greater housing need. As such, points will be awarded to each category of homelessness according to the level and severity of the housing need.

12.0 DOMESTIC ABUSE

We recognise that should someone be suffering domestic abuse within the household where they are currently staying, that it is important they are removed from this situation as quickly as possible.

We also recognise this presents an immediate housing need and priority is awarded on this basis.

Applicants affected by domestic abuse will be advised that they may seek assistance from North Lanarkshire Council and also signposted to other organisations such as Women's Aid and Aura Domestic Abuse Service commissioned by North Lanarkshire Council and any other relevant organisation which are able to provide assistance and support. The safety of the applicant will be our first priority, with confidentiality of information provided being particularly important in these cases.

The Co-operative does understand that the applicant may not want to apply through the Council's homeless assessment process. If they choose not to apply through the Council's homeless process, they would go into our 'general' or 'transfer' groups, depending upon whether they are already a tenant or not. We would award points in line with our points system.

We also understand that in some cases the victim may prefer to stay in their home and there may be circumstances under which the perpetrator could be required to leave or not return to the home. If this is the victim's preference, we will work with them to maximise their chances of being able to remain in their home.

When using our guidelines, we will treat women and men equally, whether they are in same-sex or opposite sex couples.

13.0 HARASSMENT

Harassment at or near the home is a serious problem and includes not only physical attacks and damage to property, but also verbal abuse and other behaviour which deprives people of the enjoyment of their home on the grounds of a personal attribute such as gender, racial origin, sexuality, age, disability or other factor. Victims of harassment will also be signposted to other relevant sources and advice, such as local authority, the police and voluntary and community organisations.

All applications whose household is specifically affected by harassment will be assessed on an individual basis. The level of priority will reflect the severity of the harassment and the risk to the household.

14.0 REMOVING, DEFERRING AND SUSPENDING APPLICATIONS

We aim to operate a housing list that is open and can be accessed by people in a variety of housing circumstances. However although we may accept an application, there are

circumstances where we may remove, defer or suspend an application and therefore not make an offer of housing.

Annual Review of Application

We will review applications on an on-going basis, if we do not hear from the applicant(s) for a period of 12 months we will write to them to ensure they wish to remain on the waiting list. This is important to keep the housing list up-to-date and ensure appropriate offers of housing are made.

As part of the review, we will write to the applicant asking if there have been any changes in their circumstances and if their choices of property type and area are the same.

We will give them fourteen days to reply, if they have not replied we will send you a reminder giving them seven more days to reply. If they fail to reply, we will remove their application from the housing list.

Removal of Applications

There are other times when we will remove an application from the housing list apart from the annual review.

We will remove an application from the housing list:-

- if the applicant requests, in writing, that they wish to be removed from the list;
- if the applicant dies.

Suspending, Bypassing and Deferring Applications

There are various circumstances where the Co-operative may choose not to make an offer of housing to an applicant on our list.

We may suspend an application from the list in certain circumstances. If we suspend an application, the applicant will not be offered accommodation, even if they are in housing need.

This may be for the following reasons:-

- **Bypass** – When the Co-operative does not make an offer of housing to an applicant as we are aware the property will not meet the applicant's needs or we know that the applicant will refuse the offer e.g. the applicant has recently refused the offer of a similar property in a similar area stating they were not interested in receiving similar offers;
- **Deferral** – When an applicant advised the Co-operative that they wish to remain on the housing list but do not want to receive any offers at this time. This may be due for example to health, family, financial or employment issues. Deferred applications should be kept under regular review and once the applicant requests that the deferral is lifted this should be done and a Housing Options update carried out to check the applicant's circumstances and most suitable re-housing options;

- **Suspension** – This is when the Co-operative decides that it will not make an applicant an offer of housing until certain circumstances have change, conditions are met or set for a period of time has passed. The applicant will remain on the housing list while suspended unless they ask to be removed from the list. Although suspensions can be a useful housing management approach they should be kept to a minimum.

We want to keep to a minimum the number of people we suspend from the housing list, but there are some circumstances where we may need to suspend people from the list.

We will only suspend applications from our housing list in the following circumstances:-

If the applicant owes rent that they have not agreed a repayment plan for:

If the applicant has owed their landlord rent in the past but have now paid what they owe, we will not suspend them from our list.

However, if they owe their current or former landlord rent, or service charges or money for repairs to their property because of damage they caused while they were the tenant, we may suspend their application from our housing list unless the applicant:-

- has paid what they owe in full;
- owes less than or equal to one-twelfth of the yearly rent they pay;
- has arranged to pay what they owe and have kept to that arrangement for at least the last three months, and they are still keeping to this arrangement; or
- owes rent or other charges, we may suspend their application until they meet the conditions above.

If the applicant has behaved anti-socially:-

- we may suspend their application from the housing list if the applicant, or anyone in their household have been evicted for anti-social behaviour;
- If the applicant or a member of their household have behaved anti-socially and have reached a 'Notice of Proceedings for Recovery of Possession' stage;
- the applicant or a member of their family are subject to an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO); or
- have had a 'Notice of Proceedings for Recovery of Possession' served on the applicant because they have broken the conditions of their tenancy.

Anti-social behaviour includes violence, verbal abuse, harassment, vandalism, noise disturbance, arson, carrying an offensive weapon (such as a knife), or using or selling illegal drugs. We will consider each case of anti-social behaviour on an individual basis.

We will be fair when we look at whether or not we will suspend an applicant. If we do suspend an applicant, we will usually do so for six months. After this time, we will review their suspension and consider whether they will be able to keep to the conditions of their tenancy if we make them a housing offer. If we need to or if we think it is appropriate, we will help the applicant keep to the conditions of their current tenancy by referring them to the appropriate

agencies for support. We may consider under certain circumstances making an offer of housing with a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy (SSST).

If the applicant breaks any conditions of their current tenancy agreement

We may suspend an applicant from the housing list until they meet the conditions of their tenancy. For example if they do not keep their home in an acceptable state of repair, or do not maintain their garden.

If the applicant provides false or misleading information on their application

If the applicant does this, we will usually suspend them from our housing list for six months, but we will consider their case on an individual basis. If we give them housing as a result of information on their application that is false or misleading, we may take action to repossess the property.

If the applicant does not give us the information we need to process their application

If the applicant does not give us the information we ask for so we can process or review their application, we may suspend their application until they give us the information we need.

We will write to them asking for this information, and the letters we send will clearly explain what happens if they do not give us the information we need.

If an applicant is an asylum seeker or are under immigration control

They can still apply for housing, but we cannot offer them permanent housing if they are still under immigration control and have no recourse to public funds.

This means we would suspend their application until their household has been granted 'leave to remain' in the UK, or their circumstances change so that they can receive public funds. There are some exceptions to this, for example where domestic abuse is involved.

If the applicant does not have the support they need

We will work with the applicant and with other agencies and organisations to try to make sure they have support if the applicant needs it to enable them to sustain their tenancy. If we think, after looking at their application, that they are not being supported in the way they should, we may, as a last resort, suspend their application until we are sure that their needs are being met and that they would be able to maintain any tenancy they were given.

If an applicant is violent or aggressive towards our staff

If an applicant does this, we will suspend them from our housing list for at least six months or until we have reviewed their application and it has been agreed we should lift the suspension.

If the applicant is in prison

We will suspend their application while they are in prison as they will not be in a position to accept any offers. This suspension will be removed in line with the Prison Discharge Protocol so that we can consider their application nearer the time of their release.

If the applicant refuses two reasonable offers of housing

The Co-operative does not limit the number of offers given to an applicant therefore refusal of an offer of housing will not result in an applicant having their applications suspended.

If the applicant request to suspend their application

The applicant can also choose to have their application suspended voluntarily, for example, if they want to suspend their application until they are actually in need of rehousing, for example if they move to work abroad for a period of time. They can do this in writing or by speaking to us. They must let us know how long they want the suspension to last for when they first apply. When they ask for their application to be re-instated on the waiting list, their 'time in need' date will change to the date we reinstate their application. They can only voluntarily suspend their application once.

If we suspend their application, we will send them a letter telling them why we have done this, what they can do so that we remove the suspension and how they can appeal against the suspension. We will review their suspension every month.

Cancellations and Reinstating applications

The Co-operative will cancel an application for the following reasons:-

- if the applicant fails to respond when we contact them to review their application;
- the applicant requests their application be cancelled;
- On the death of the applicant.

The Co-operative will reinstate an application if the applicant gets back in touch within a period of six months and the applicant will not require to complete another form. After 6 months the application will be cancelled and the applicant will require to begin the process again with a Housing Option Interview.

Monitoring Suspensions

Any suspensions will be monitored on a regular basis by the Housing Officer. We will endeavour to keep suspensions to a minimum by working closely with our applicants.

15.0 SUSTAINABLE AND BALANCED COMMUNITIES

The Co-operative will actively seek to encourage the development of a sustainable and balanced community.

To assist in this we will:-

- Monitor our stock turnover, number of refusals and reasons, reasons for terminating tenancies and the type of household being rehoused;
- Identify and justify appropriate courses of action, such as a local lettings initiatives, intensive estate management and prioritising work within our investment or new build programme to deal with issues that are identified;

- Apply discretion and sensitive letting as detailed under “Using discretion and sensitive letting” section of this Policy.
- Help provide a better understanding of the problems within a community and by doing so initiate support and assistance from the wider community and other agencies in taking a joint approach to alleviating the situation and making the area a better place to live and help with sustainability.

Housing Support

The Co-operative will ensure that every effort will be made to work with other agencies to ensure any support required for households are in place. Failure to have this in place could result in the applicant being deferred until such time as the appropriate support can be made available to the applicant.

Rehousing Registered Sex Offenders

Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) were introduced as a result of the Management of Offenders etc (Scotland) Act 2005.

In conjunction with North Lanarkshire Council we manage any allocations to offenders covered by the MAPPA arrangements at a senior level and in consultation with relevant agencies such as the Police and Social Work Services.

All aspects of this policy may not be applied in making any such offer and any offer of housing will be dealt in line with MAPPA (Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements) Protocols which cover the North Lanarkshire Council area.

16.0 LOCAL LETTINGS INITIATIVES

Our Allocations Policy aims to create a simple, straightforward system for offering properties to people who need housing because some areas within our stock are less popular than others. This means that in some areas we require additional flexibility with the process of encouraging people to want to live within the community and remain living there.

We will try and avoid over concentration of vulnerable tenants with similar needs within a densely populated area.

In certain parts of the community that the Co-operative manages stock and where there are low demand or difficult to let properties, we may use a local lettings initiative to ensure the best use of housing stock in creating a stable and sustainable community.

These initiatives can include:-

- Allocating a proportion of our properties to specific groups of applicants and providing a support network;
- By being involved in letting initiatives / projects with NLC or other agencies i.e. Re-settlement and Relocation Project or NHS International Recruitment or Rapid

Re-housing Transition Plan (RRTP) and Homes First working in partnership with North Lanarkshire Council;

- Introducing a special initiative like helping a tenant to move into the house or with supplying paint / decoration vouchers or a tenancy starter pack.

To allow an area to be designated as “difficult to let” and local lettings initiatives to be developed, the area or street will have:-

- Low demand / little waiting list for houses in the area;
- Offers of tenancies frequently refused;
- High turnover within certain types of property i.e. flats

Due to this the Policy will allow us the flexibility to introduce local lettings initiatives to encourage people to take up properties in areas that are more difficult to let while ensuring a well-balanced housing mix and sustainable community. Proposals for this type of project would be submitted to the Management Committee for approval as the opportunity or need arises.

We will only consider initiatives that will enhance, improve and promote sustainable tenancies, build sustainable communities and ensure a balanced housing mix. Any initiative or plan would be an open and transparent framework for the Co-operative to set out how it intends to allocate houses to work alongside our aims and objectives of the Allocations Policy.

17.0 MUTUAL EXCHANGES

Tenants may find that the solution to improve their unmet housing needs is to arrange a swap, or an exchange, with another household which has similar requirements for a suitable exchange.

This arrangement is known as a Mutual Exchange. Tenants can arrange this themselves with other Co-operative tenants or other Registered Social Landlord tenants on the approval of each landlord and under certain conditions and stipulated within our mutual exchange procedures.

18.0 EMPLOYEES AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS

We do not exclude any employee, former employee, Management Committee Member, former Management Committee Member or close relatives of employee or former employees from applying for a tenancy, transfer of tenancy or mutual exchange.

These individuals must apply through the normal application process, will be subject to the same assessment procedure and will be allocated housing based on their housing need as assessed through the Allocations Policy and not be involved in the allocation process in any way.

The granting of tenancies to employees and Management Committee members of the Co-operative, and people closely connected to them, are subject to the controls described in the Co-operative’s Policy on Entitlements, Payments and Benefits. The Policy sets out the procedures that must be followed if anyone in these categories is applying for a tenancy.

In line with this Policy this is permitted as long as –

- it is in accordance with our published allocations policy and;
- neither the applicant or anyone connected to the applicant is involved in any way or in any part of the allocation process and;
- the offer is approved by the Governing Body in advance and;
- the tenancy is recorded as an interest in the appropriate register within five days of the tenancy commencing.

When the allocation is concerning a Management Committee member or a close relative of a Management Committee member, the member must declare an interest and leave the meeting when the issue is discussed.

19.0 MANAGEMENT TRANSFER/ SPECIAL LETS

Management Transfers or Special Lets are intended to respond to urgent housing needs that are not fully recognised under the Allocations Policy. While the Allocations Policy provides a comprehensive framework for letting the Co-operative's housing, we may consider making special lets in exceptional circumstances.

The Housing Manager has delegated authority to make decisions on any proposed special lets, and will report to the Management Committee on the number and general circumstances of any such cases. Decision-making must be fully documented, to ensure that decisions are open to scrutiny if required.

20.0 RESPONSIBILITIES & STAFF TRAINING

Responsibility

The practical implementation of the policy and the day to day operations of the allocations procedures will be undertaken by the Co-operative's housing management and administrative operational team. They are responsible for the housing options interview, the assessment of applications and the Housing Officer is responsible to oversee this process and for the allocation of void properties.

To ensure accuracy and consistency all assessed applications will be checked and countersigned by two members of the housing management and administrative operational team.

Any special cases or need to deviate from the policy will be considered by the Housing Manager and if necessary reported via the Management Committee.

Staff Training

The Co-operative will work in conjunction with North Lanarkshire Council via the CHR to provide all staff who are required to undertake work in the allocation process receive the appropriate training.

This along with the policy and procedures will provide guidelines to staff to ensure consistent and equitable treatment of applicants seeking a tenancy with the Co-operative.

21.0 MEASURING AND MONITORING PERFORMANCE

The Co-operative will monitor our performance to assess whether our stated objectives are being achieved and review as required. We will produce an Annual Report which will be made available to tenants and on our website.

The Management Committee will be presented with quarterly performance reports on the allocations. These reports will detail the:-

- number of lets;
- time taken to re-let;
- rental loss;
- offers refused;
- reasons for terminations;
- sustainability.

This reporting will highlight our performance against the Scottish Average, Key Performance Indicators and that of the same quarter the previous year.

Our performance reporting will monitor our performance against relevant outcomes and standards in the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

22.0 THE RIGHT OF APPEAL

If at any time an applicant is unhappy with a decision or with an offer, they may appeal to the Housing Manager who in the first instance will deal with the appeals and advise of the decision taken. If the applicant is still unhappy, they can appeal to the Depute Director/Director. All appeals should be made in writing.

An applicant can make a complaint via our Complaints Policy and Procedure if they feel their application has not been dealt with in a fair or consistent manner and in accordance with the written policy or that they have not been treated reasonably. A copy of the policy is available on request or on the Co-operative's website.

If, after having followed our complaints procedure, an applicant is still unsatisfied with how we have dealt with their complaint, they have the right to appeal to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

The Ombudsman will not normally deal with complaints regarding our policies unless it is considered that the policy operates unfairly, and the applicant has followed our Complaints Policy.

23.0 DATA PROTECTION

The Co-operative will process information and data contained within the application in accordance with its policies and procedures relating to the General Data Protection Regulations.

Information regarding how data will be used and the basis for processing data is provided in the Co-operative's Fair Processing Notice.

24.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The Co-operative will consider and provide all applicants with fair and equal treatment and will not discriminate against anyone on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex (gender) sexual orientation or marriage and civil partnership. We will comply with all relevant equal opportunities requirements contained within our policies on Equality and Diversity.

25.0 HUMAN RIGHTS

The Human Rights Act 1988 gives every individual the right to respect for private life; the right to respect for family life; and the right to respect for their home. The Act provides protection against discrimination and the applicant's human rights are also enshrined in international law.

We will aim to ensure that this is achieved during the assessment and allocation process.

26.0 POLICY REVIEW

This Policy will be reviewed every 5 years or sooner if required by statutory, regulatory or best practice requirements.