

An introduction to housing allocations



What is an allocations policy and why is it needed?

An allocations policy sets out how your landlord is going to let its houses. Social landlords (Councils and Housing Associations) are responsible for their own allocations policy and will use their own system of allocating their houses. However, they **must** adhere to a number of specific requirements set out in housing law (see our fact sheet on the legal framework).

An allocations policy is necessary so that housing is allocated by the Council in a fair, consistent and transparent way. Some of the key objectives of an allocations policy might include:

- Allocating the houses to meet people's housing needs (see over)
- Meeting all the legal requirements and good practice standards
- Promoting equal opportunities and eradicating discrimination
- Making the best use of the houses available (minimising difficult to let housing and minimising empty housing and loss of income)
- Contributing to balanced and stable communities (decisions about allocating houses has important implications on the social mix of communities)
- Ensuring confidentiality when processing applicants' personal details
- Providing applicants with detailed information and advice about their housing options
- Involving applicants and tenants in the development and regular review of the allocations policy and procedures

What do you think should be the key objectives for South Lanarkshire Council's allocation policy?

What types of information can you expect to find in an allocations policy?

The types of things you might expect an allocations policy to include are:

- a description of the landlords aims and targets to be achieved
- the routes or opportunities for re-housing (e.g. direct applications, transfers, referrals, nominations, homelessness, mutual exchanges or mobility schemes)
- how applicants are assessed and prioritised
- information about local lettings initiatives if there are any
- how applicants can obtain advice and other options for housing
- Applicant's obligations (i.e. providing accurate information, updating and refusing offers)
- how the landlord will measure performance
- how applicants can appeal against a decision
- how applicants can make a complaint

What's housing need? Meeting housing need means that the **needs** of particular groups of people have to be taken into consideration and that they are given priority over other applicants. Your landlord will decide which categories of housing need to target, but some examples could include:

- people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness
- people living in sub-standard or un-satisfactory housing conditions
- people living in overcrowded conditions
- large families
- people who are under occupied
- people who have a lack of , or are sharing amenities (e.g. hot water, or kitchen or bathroom facilities)
- people who suffer from particular medical conditions

- victims of violence, harassment or anti-social behaviour
- people moving nearer caring support (giving or receiving)
- people who need to be nearer employment, school, or special facilities
- people who need to move because of fostering or access
- people leaving the armed forces
- those whose present accommodation is scheduled for clearance or demolition

What do you think should be on this list? Which categories of people do you think are in particular 'housing need' and should be prioritised against other applicants?

How are applicants prioritised? Once your landlord has identified the different housing need groups / categories — how applicants are going to be prioritised needs to be decided. There needs to be some form of waiting list – and a system to prioritise applications on that list. There are a number of different systems used by landlords to prioritise housing need:

- **points systems**
- **date order systems**
- **groups plus points systems**
- **referral systems**
- **quotas**

Each of these systems have advantages and disadvantages however, the most popular systems used by landlords are points systems or groups plus points systems. In a points system a set number of points are given to each of the housing need factors. For example a set number of points for the level of overcrowding, for the lack of amenities or for medical factors. The total number of points awarded to each applicant would determine their place on the waiting list. Housing is then normally allocated to the person on the list who has the highest number of points.

In a group plus points system a number of groups or categories are identified. Examples of categories could be transfer applicants, general needs groups or those requiring adapted property. Applicants are fitted into one of the groups determined by their housing need. A degree of priority is given to each group/category. Points can then be awarded to each applicant within each group. Unlike the 'pure' points system, priority depends on the relative priority given to each group.

The SLTDSP has produced five Fact sheets on housing allocations; An Introduction to Housing Allocations, The Legal Framework for Allocations Policies, SLC Allocations' policy, Common Housing Registers and Choice Based Lettings. These are all available free by contacting the Project on 01698 527108.