

## Policy details

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## Policy Statement

The objective of the **Allocations Policy** is to clearly define Co-op Homes' commitment to provide good quality housing at affordable rents to those in housing need. Co-op Homes therefore aims, via the Allocations Policy to:

- Ensure that its housing stock is used effectively to meet the needs of its current and future residents.
- Assist the boroughs with whom we work in meeting their statutory duties towards people designated as being in housing need. This will be achieved by offering an agreed percentage of true voids to the local authority each year in line with their nomination rights' agreements.
- Be flexible and sensitive in responding to the complex individual circumstances of households applying for housing.

## Guiding Principles

This policy is designed to ensure that the specific housing difficulties experienced by particular groups are met. These include older people, single people, families with young children, single parent families, ethnic minorities, young people without family support, people who are victims of domestic violence and people with disabilities.

Access to housing will be open and equal to all sections of the community in housing need. Co-op Homes' Allocations Policy will be made widely available to residents and the wider community by being published on our web page or sent on request. New customers are given the opportunity to comment on the Allocations Policy via feedback form in correspondence.

Co-op Homes wishes to ensure equality in access to its accommodation and in allocation of its property and will monitor the ethnicity, disability and vulnerability issues of applicants and of those who are re-housed to assess whether it is achieving this objective.

At the commencement of their tenancy with Co-op Homes, all new tenants in permanent accommodation will be issued with an Assured Shorthold Tenancy Agreement which will be converted to an Assured Tenancy after 12 months. The conversion will be subject to Co-op Homes' confirmation that the tenant(s) has not breached any term of their initial tenancy agreement. New tenants housed in short life property will be issued with an Assured Shorthold tenancy.

No tenancy agreements, whether Assured or Assured Shorthold, will be issued unless they

are signed or authorised for signature by a Manager from Co-op Homes.

## How we will implement the Policy

### Access to housing

All new applications for housing with Co-op Homes must be made via the Local Authorities' Common Housing Register. Co-op Homes will house an agreed percentage of nominated applicants from the Local Authority where the property is situated and where the applicant meets local eligibility criteria.

Co-op Homes will maintain a transfer waiting list for existing tenants who wish to transfer within its stock when eligible true-void properties become available. The transfer list will also include other residents who require a priority transfer because:

- There is an immediate risk to their safety or because they are suffering from a severe disability (management transfer).
- Repair work needs completion that cannot be carried out with the tenant in occupation (decant).
- The resident has been granted succession to a tenancy on condition that they transfer to smaller accommodation (conditional succession).

### Transfers

Co-op Homes will facilitate transfers as a means of making the best use of its housing stock and will accept applications for transfer from all its tenants. It will, however, be pointed out to potential registrants that due to a limited number of available properties becoming void per local authority each year and the nomination agreements in place, it is highly unlikely that a transfer offer will be made and the Housing Officer will discuss other housing options that might prove more successful for the tenant.

Notwithstanding the above, tenants will not normally be permitted to move unless they have:

- A clear rent account.
- Conducted their tenancy in a satisfactory manner.
- Have completed their probationary tenancy period.

All transfer applicants, with the exception of management transfers, decants, and those transferring because of conditional succession, will be registered and priority for a transfer will be determined on assessment of the overall needs of the applicant and then by the length of time an applicant has been registered for a transfer.

In the case of under-occupancy or pressing medical or welfare needs, Co-op Homes may award Priority status to transfer applicants. Priority applicants will take precedence over standard applicants. Should more than one priority applicant apply for a vacant property, the applicant who has held their priority status the longest will take precedence. All transfer applicants will be required to renew their application in writing at the request of the Community Housing Adviser. Failure to renew will deem the transfer application cancelled.

## Nomination Monitoring

Co-op Homes undertakes to assist the boroughs in which it works to meet its statutory duties towards people in housing need. Co-op Homes will provide an agreed percentage (generally 75%) of its true voids to the respective Local Authority each year. This will be in accordance with signed nominations rights/allocations agreements.

A true void is defined as:

- Voids within new build / newly rehabilitated schemes.
- Voids created by the death of a tenant where there is no statutory right to succession.
- Voids created by tenants buying their own property in the private sector.
- Void created by eviction or abandonment of the property.
- Void created by tenants who provide notice.
- Non-priority transfers (only priority transfers (management transfers) are counted as non – true voids).

The remainder of true voids per local authority each year (generally 25%) will be used to facilitate transfers of existing Co-op Homes' tenants. Therefore, only the fourth void per year (if this occurs) can be retained by Co-op Homes to re-house those on its transfer list.

Each Local Authority has an agreed time by which it must provide Co-op Homes with a nomination. Should this time target not be met, this would be classed as a failed nomination. The Local Authority has an agreed number of attempts to provide Co-op Homes with a suitable nomination (generally 3). After 3 failed nominations, Co-op Homes can retain the property for its own use (over and above its 25% quota).

Should a nominated applicant refuse the offer of the property, the Local Authority will be informed and will decide if it was a suitable offer. The offer would then be enforced or withdrawn accordingly. In the case of a withdrawn offer the Local Authority will provide another nomination within the agreed time limits. After 3 failed nominations, Co-op Homes can retain the property for its own use.

Where a Choice Based Lettings Allocations scheme is in place, the Local Authority will nominate several applicants to a group viewing of the property with the Community Housing Adviser. The highest priority applicant has the first right of acceptance/refusal after which the second highest applicant can accept/refuse accordingly and so-on until the offer is accepted.

### **Refusal of a nominee by Co-op Homes**

On receiving a nomination Co-op Homes will assess the suitability of the nominated applicant and may reasonably refuse a nomination from the Local Authority where:

- There is a mismatch between the requirements of the nominee and the size of the dwelling for which they have been nominated.
- A particular dwelling has been designated for use by a particular category of applicant and the nominee does not fall within such category.

- The nominee has been previously evicted from a Co-op Homes property for a serious breach of tenancy other than rent arrears.

The above is not an exhaustive list of reasons for refusal. Co-op Homes will also consider rejecting a nominee where there is evidence of a previous serious breach of tenancy, such as anti-social behaviour, harassment or threats to other residents, staff or agents working for Co-op Homes.

In the case of vulnerable customers with a complex set of needs where inadequate provision has been made to meet their support needs and/or where any behaviour demonstrated gives concern that the applicant is not engaging with the support package provided, Co-op Homes reserves the right to reject the applicant for a given property until further investigations are carried out. Such investigations will be monitored to ensure that there is no unlawful discrimination against the applicant.

## Transfer List Management

### Management Transfers

Properties required for management transfer cases are deemed to be **non-true voids** and fall outside of the quotas contained within Nomination Rights Agreements.

Co-op Homes will give overriding priority to tenants requiring transfers to alternative accommodation to remove them from an immediate risk or a potentially dangerous situation. Such situations may include but are not confined to domestic violence and racial harassment. All applications for management transfer must be made in adherence to the Emergency Rehousing Procedure and approved by the Head of Operations before submission.

Management Transfer is a "one-offer" policy and allocations will be made on a like-for-like bedroom size basis, unless the applicant was already registered as a priority for a larger sized property on the standard waiting list or their current home is too large for their needs.

All approved Management Transfer cases are subject to a 3 month review whilst waiting for an offer to ensure that the over-riding priority awarded remains relevant and also to ensure that the best and most appropriate offer is made taking into account the presenting contributory factors.

### Decants

Properties required for decant cases are deemed to be non-true voids and fall outside of the quotas contained within the Nomination Rights Agreements

Co-op Homes will give over-riding priority to tenants requiring transfers to alternative accommodation due to major works, extensive repairs or improvements that cannot be carried out while the tenant remains in occupation. Generally tenants will be offered short-term temporary accommodation arranged whilst the work is carried out, although in some cases permanent alternative accommodation can be considered.

## **Under Occupancy**

In order to release much needed larger accommodation and to assist in the primary objective of housing those in the greatest need and make best use of our housing stock, Co-op Homes will award priority to customers who are under occupying their property and wish to move to smaller accommodation through transfer.

## **Medical Grounds**

Applicants or anyone else included on the application who considers that living in their Co-op Homes property is having a harmful effect on their health - or the health of anyone else included in the application - will be asked to complete a Medical Self-Assessment form, describing their health problems. This will also apply to applicants or other household members who consider they need to move on grounds relating to disability. The form will be presented to a suitably qualified Medical Adviser who will assess whether the information provided entitles the customer to medical priority. Co-op Homes will convert assessments of a severe nature to that of a Priority under medical grounds. Medical assessment of mild or moderate will be noted on the application but will not be considered for Priority consideration unless the award will take the applicant over the threshold mentioned above.

## **Welfare Needs**

Co-op Homes takes welfare needs for its transferring customers into account because we wish to address problems that threaten our customer's ability to live independently or to improve the life chances either of themselves or of members of their family. Welfare need particularly includes but is not confined to mental distress, which is exacerbated by a person's housing environment and while it persists impairs their ability to manage family affairs. Welfare needs are not normally sufficient on their own to qualify an applicant for a management transfer. However, an applicant may be approved as a priority on welfare grounds alone, provided their condition means that:

- there is a significant risk to their welfare or that of a member of their family;
- and
- a move to a different environment is likely to alleviate the condition; and
- the transfer is to a "like for like" or smaller property.

## **Adapted Properties/Disabled Clients**

Co-op Homes is committed to deliver an equal service to all its client groups, especially the disabled whose needs may not be best met through either the local authority's standard allocation processes or Co-op Homes' allocations process. Any adapted property returned for letting will not be modified to remove adaptations save for repairs necessary to fulfill current health and safety regulations or on the advice of the occupational therapist. Instead, Co-op Homes will look to find a suitable applicant either from the local authority's waiting list or Co-op Homes' own transfer lists.

## **Conditional Succession cases**

Co-op Homes will make available a proportion of its percentage of properties where there is a legal requirement to offer alternative accommodation. This includes but is not

restricted to existing households who have the legal right to succeed to the tenancy of a family sized property. Such succession will generally be on the condition that the move is to a smaller or more suitably sized property. Properties will be allocated within a given time period of 6 – 12 months from the date the succession was granted. Co-op Homes will take customers' needs into account and will attempt to meet all their requirements in the first offer made.

***Due to the shortage of available properties being returned to Co-op Homes for letting all tenants wishing to transfer will be advised to join their Local Authority's Common Housing Register to increase their opportunity of being offered a suitable property. Tenants will also be encouraged to seek a Mutual Exchange partner.***

## Mutual Exchange

Co-op Homes' tenants have the right to exchange their home with any other secure tenant, or with an assured tenant of a registered housing association or a charitable housing trust, provided they have the written permission of their landlord before the exchange takes place. Due to the small amount of properties being returned for letting each year, Co-op Homes encourages mutual exchanges between tenants within its own housing stock, or with tenants of other housing associations or local authorities to increase the opportunities of its residents to move.

The scheme will be operated in accordance with the Housing Act 1985 and Co-op Homes may only refuse the exchange on the specific grounds set out in Schedule 3 of the Housing Act 1985. i.e.:

- The tenant or the proposed assignee is subject to a possession order or a suspended possession order (this includes action for rent arrears).
- A notice seeking possession is in force against the tenant or proposed assignee or possession proceedings have begun against either party (this includes action for rent arrears).
- The accommodation is substantially larger than is required by the proposed assignee.
- The size of the accommodation is not reasonably suitable for the needs of the assignee.
- The landlord is a charity and the proposed assignee's occupation would conflict with the objects of the charity.
- The property is designed to make it suitable for a physically disabled person and if the exchange took place, there would be no such person living in the property.

Co-op Homes will pay to allow all its tenants to register and partake in the National Mutual Exchange Register at [www.homeswapper.co.uk](http://www.homeswapper.co.uk) and subject to demand, will facilitate a message board facility on its own website at [www.coophomes.coop](http://www.coophomes.coop)

Co-op Homes has a separate Mutual Exchange Policy & Procedure which sets out the current guidelines for operation.

## Restriction of lettings

Co-op Homes will not grant a tenancy to anyone who is, or in the last 12 months has been, a Board Member or employee of Co-op Homes, or is a close relative of such a person. Any claim for exemption to this restriction must be declared to and approved by the Managing Director of Co-op Homes; however, subject to any Governance Policies on Payments and Benefits in force and/or any other relevant policy and procedure, Co-op Homes could consider:

- Housing an employee or their relative.
- Housing a Board member or relative with special needs requiring an adapted property.
- Housing a Board member or relative who is statutorily homeless and who has been nominated by a local authority, or is already a Co-op Homes tenant who has registered for a housing transfer.

Under section 22 of the Immigration Act 2014, and subject to any schemes in force from a given date, Co-op Homes will not authorise an adult to occupy property as their only or main home under a residential tenancy agreement unless the adult is a British citizen, or EEA or Swiss national, or has a "right to rent" in the UK.

Co-op Homes will carry out its own simple document checks (in addition to any checks carried out by the nominating local authority) before allowing adults to occupy (either as a tenant, member of the tenants household, or a lodger of the tenant), to ensure that prospective occupiers have the right to rent in the UK.

If any follow-up checks indicate that the person no longer has the right to rent, Co-op Homes will report the matter to the Home Office as soon as reasonably practicable and will take steps to re-possess the property.

## Access to Information

Co-op Homes will provide information to potential applicants for housing about its allocations policy, including guidance on eligibility, how to apply for housing and the assessment of housing needs.

Co-op Homes will provide similar information to transfer applicants.

Co-op Homes will take action for repossession or withdraw an offer or accommodation if an applicant knowingly and recklessly provides false information that results in the inappropriate allocation of a property.

## Equal opportunities and Consultation

Co-op Homes is committed to providing equal access to its housing, regardless of race, nationality, ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, sexual orientation, gender; disability, age, illness, marital or employment status.

Co-op Homes will work to eliminate discrimination in all aspects of housing allocations,

including the acceptance of applications for re-housing, the prioritisation of applicants and the letting of properties.

Co-op Homes will maintain records of the ethnic origin of applicants and will monitor lettings made to such applicants to ensure that lettings to BME households are proportionate to the BME housing need or census data in the area where we have homes.

Co-op Homes will consult with the local authority and other appropriate agencies on a regular basis to identify housing need and to maintain good practice in housing allocations.

Co-op Homes will also encourage new, existing or potential customers to comment and feedback on this document to ensure that it remains relevant.

Appeals against any decision made while applying the Allocations Policy, will be dealt with through the Complaints Procedure and should be submitted in writing/by email to the Head of Operations.

## **Responsibilities**

The Business Services Manager is responsible for:

- The effective implementation of this policy.
- Ensuring that the management arrangements and systems in place are undertaken efficiently and effectively.
- Ensuring that relevant staff is trained in the policy and the associated procedures.
- Monitoring housing allocations to different groups.
- Approving management transfer applications containing all relevant documentation from Housing Advisors.
- Awarding social and welfare points and priority status in line with any points system in force
- Ensuring that all lettings are recorded in the Continuous Recording (CORE) of lettings system and submitted to the HCA.

Co-op Homes will review this policy at least every 3 years.