

South Western Housing Society

Allocations and Lettings Policy

1. Statement of Intent

The Society is committed to providing homes for those least able to obtain housing and will:

- participate in local choice based lettings systems and common housing registers
- follow the principles of the Housing Corporation regulatory guidance
- work closely with local authority partners to ensure we assist them to address their strategic priorities
- ensure that our lettings support the sustainability of our homes and our estates.

2. Priority Groups

The Society in order to achieve its overall aim will prioritise the following groups in its allocation of property:

- People living in temporary or insecure accommodation
- People living in unsanitary, overcrowded or unsatisfactory conditions
- Households with dependent children
- People whose needs are based on medical or welfare grounds
- People whose social or economic circumstances would otherwise prevent them from securing their own accommodation
- People who are over retirement age and who need further support and assistance
- Society tenants wishing to move

3. Equality of Opportunity

The Society has an expressed aim of allocating homes fairly and providing equality for all in the allocation of its homes. It will ensure that no person is treated differently on the basis of their race, colour, ethnic or national origin, disability, religion, sexuality, gender, age, caring responsibilities, illness or marital status.

The Society has only a limited amount of accommodation available and works across a number of local authority areas and we recognise that we will not be able to meet demand both from new applicants and from existing tenants due to the low rate of vacancies that occur.

Records are kept to monitor ethnicity, gender and disability of applicants.

Appropriate statistics will be collected and communicated to CORE (Continuous Recording of Lettings).

The Society will review the statistical returns annually to ensure appropriate monitoring against the objectives set out in its Equality and Diversity Policy

4. Access to the Society's Housing

4.1 Potential applicants are identified or referred to the Society through a variety of mechanisms:

- The Common Housing Register/Choiced Based Lettings
- The Society's own waiting list
- Mutual Exchange
- The Society's Internal Transfer list
- Decant procedures
- Succession

4.2 The Common Housing Register/Choiced Based Lettings

The Society is committed to providing allocations through the CHR/CBL schemes. These schemes are designed so that an applicant needs only one application form to gain access to any of the members housing. Common registers have advantages for both applicants and landlords in that they prevent delays and confusion in the allocation process and improve efficiency.

The Society's involvement in such schemes does not compromise its independence. The Society sets its own priorities according to this letting policy and will not normally consider applicants/nominations who can afford to purchase their own homes.

4.3 The Waiting List

The Society will maintain its own independent waiting list to ensure it complies with the requirements of charitable status. The Society is happy to receive referrals to its own waiting list from a variety of sources including housing advice centres, citizens advice bureaus, local authorities, voluntary agencies and through self referral of individuals in need. Applicants will be required to complete an application form.

All applications will be assessed using the Society's points system (attached as Appendix A) and applicants will be required to update the Society should their circumstances change

The Society will provide two reasonable offers; if these are declined the applicant will be removed from the Society's waiting list.

Applicants who can afford to purchase their own properties will not normally be considered for Society housing unless exceptional circumstances exist.

4.4 Mutual Exchanges

Society tenants have the right to exchange their tenancies by way of assignment with other Society tenants or with those of another housing association or local authority provided written consent is given.

Permission is normally granted but may be withheld if:

- There are arrears of rent (other than delayed HB) or other breach of tenancy by either party in the last 12 months
- Legal proceedings are being taken against either party
- The incoming tenant would either overcrowd or substantially under occupy the property
- The property is specialist housing (ie sheltered or specially adapted for disabled people) for which the incoming tenant is not suitable
- The application is not a genuine exchange or is fraudulent

A register of tenants who want to exchange will be held at the office for tenants to review, together with application forms for those who wish to register.

4.5 Internal Transfers

Existing tenants of the Society may apply for a transfer to accommodation better suited to their needs, subject to availability. Priorities between transfers are determined according to need or the ability to make better use of the accommodation.

All transfer applicants must demonstrate that:

- They have lived at their current address for 12 months.
- There have been no breaches of the tenancy agreement in the last 12 months.
- They have a clear rent account, and do not owe the Society money for other housing related debts.

- The current accommodation has been maintained to a reasonable standard.

In exceptional circumstances an offer may be made to an applicant who does not fulfil all the above criteria. Exceptions will only be made in extreme cases such as urgent transfers for those who have had domestic violence, harassment (as defined under the Society's harassment policy) or hate crimes directed against them or on the advice of a medical assessor. In all such cases the reasons for disregarding the above criteria will be documented on the house file.

Properties will be allocated to transfer applicants in accordance with the criteria for allocating property.

Transfer applications are recorded by area of choice, property size requirements and date order. Cases classified as urgent will be prioritised.

Examples of urgent transfers will be:

- applicants needing to move for domestic violence or harassment.
- applicants who are overcrowded in their current property.
- applicants who are under-occupying their current property and wishing to move to smaller accommodation
- applicants needing to move to supported housing
- cases where the existing tenant needs to be decanted by the Society
- urgent medical reasons for a move
- applicants needing to move for employment or support requirements
- applicants needing to move for other urgent housing management reasons.

In allocating a property to a priority transfer the Society will consider how the circumstances of each applicant fit into one or more of the above examples.

Allocations other than prioritised applications will be made in date order to applicants seeking property in the area requiring the type of property allocated. Exceptions may be made in respect of fully adapted properties and these will be recorded on the house file.

If the standard of accommodation that a person is transferring from falls below excepted standards, decoration allowances for the new property may be suspended, or in serious cases, the tenant will be refused a move unless the existing home is brought up to standard.

All transfer applicants who refuse two reasonable offers will have their application suspended for 12 months

Transfer applicants must inform the Society of any changes to circumstances that affect their application. Any offer made to an applicant, subsequently found to be fraudulent will be withdrawn.

4.7 Decants

Decanting will only be authorised where urgent repairs or improvements cannot be carried out with the tenants in occupation, or where property disposal is intended.

All decisions will be taken in line with the Society's Decants policy. However the urgent need for decant may take priority over all other lettings and nomination arrangements including transfers.

4.8 Succession

In the event of a tenant's death, a spouse, long term partner (including same sex and transgender partners) close relative or carer living in the property may succeed to the tenancy, providing he/she has occupied the premises as his/her only principal home for the previous twelve months. In legal terms, succession may occur only once, but the Society, in exceptional circumstances, retains the discretion to grant another new tenancy if appropriate.

5. Priority

Priority in the first instance will be given to the Society's tenants who wish to transfer, subject to them meeting conditions identified in the transfer section.

Subsequently 75% of allocations will be drawn from the Common Housing Register/Choced Based Lettings schemes and 25% from its own waiting list.

Certain exceptions will be made in respect of:

- The requirement to decant tenants and to offer alternative accommodation
- Housing where planning restrictions have to be met (Section 106) in which case the legal requirements will take precedence over the Society's targets.
- Rural exception schemes where there is a requirement for local lettings.
- Local lettings plans - On new developments, or on estates where there are significant management problems, the Society

may consider a local lettings plan to achieve stable communities and sustainable tenancies.

6. Eligible Applicants

6.1 Those eligible will be:

Anyone over the age of eighteen who:

- cannot afford to provide their own housing.
- Is in housing need
- has established a local connection or has reason to move into the area for reasons of, for example, employment, providing care or support to another family member (family in this context is not exclusive to immediate blood ties and may include same sex partners and transgender partners)
- people relocating for reasons of domestic violence or hate crime perpetrated against them, people relocating for support needs or for reasons of health and well being
- older people requiring accommodation with support who are unable to secure such housing for themselves.

6.2 Schedule 1

Members of the Society's Board, any of their relatives and the Society's employees or any of their relatives may only be rehoused within the provisions of Schedule 1 of the 1996 Housing Act. Such cases will require the consent of the Board before any housing can be offered.

6.3 Re-housing of Asylum Seekers and applicants from the European Union A8 countries

Applicants in these cases will be eligible to be considered providing there is:

- A positive status determination by the Home Office in the case of Asylum seekers
- Compliance with the Home Office Workers Registration scheme in the case of A8 applicants.

7. Exclusions

7.1 The Society does not operate a blanket policy of refusing applications for specific reasons, but we may not consider people for housing in certain circumstances. Each instance will be considered on a case by case basis and if we decide to exclude an applicant on any of the following grounds then the applicant will be advised that they can appeal against our decision using our complaints procedure. Applicants

will be informed of the actions that they need to take before they can be reconsidered for housing with the Society

The examples below are instances where we may refuse to consider applicants for housing:

- Those who have sufficient income and/or savings to secure their own housing solution, except for applicants who are older people requiring accommodation with support, where they are unable to secure such accommodation for themselves.
- Those who have no or very low levels of need.
- Those who have suitable alternative accommodation available.
- Those who have rent arrears or other housing debts with their existing landlord (other than delayed housing benefit or as a result of domestic violence). The Society will consider each case individually taking into account any repayment plans.
- Those who have breached the terms of their present or a former tenancy within the last two years. The Society will consider each case individually and will take account of the seriousness of the breaches and the evidence available.
- Those who have deliberately threatened to or committed acts of violence, abuse or harassment against staff or other tenants of the Society or of another social landlord.
- Those who are perpetrators of harassment, domestic violence or hate crimes.
- Those who have deliberately deprived themselves of adequate housing with the intention of being re-housed by the Society.
- Applicants with support needs where the Society is unable to ensure the support is available or the level of support required will seriously undermine the Society's ability to support other residents in the scheme.

8. Special Cases

8.1 In exceptional circumstances the Housing Manager may have discretion to authorise the acceptance of an application from a household with circumstances listed in sections 7- in addition other cases may be considered as special cases as follows:

- Young people over the age of 16 and resident in the Society's areas may be able to register for housing if they are in housing need. Support from Social Services and/or a guardian will be required to act as a guarantor for any tenancy offered
- Consideration may be given to key workers whose jobs are important to the local community.

- High risk ex- offenders - where the Society is asked to house applicants who are ex-offenders and are likely to pose a risk to the community. A full risk assessment, including liaison with the police and the local authority will be undertaken to support any final decision.

All applications accepted on the above grounds will be reported to the Board at six monthly intervals.

9. Criteria for Allocating Properties

9.1 Properties will be allocated on the basis of:

- The number of bedrooms matching family size.
- The physical layout and design of the property matching the applicants needs, as assessed by a medical expert
- The location of the property, if the offer is made on the basis of harassment/hate crime or domestic violence.
- The location of family or other relatives if support is a requirement.

Properties will be allocated on the basis of bed size required according to the following:

PROPERTY TYPE	ALLOCATED TO
Bed sitting room or 1 bedroom/1 person	Single person
1 bedroom 2 person	Single person/couple
2 bedroom 3 person	Couple or one adult (subject to need and demand) families with 1 child, 2 single people
2 bedroom 4 person	Couple or one adult families with 1 or 2 children
3 bedroom 5 person	Couple or one adult families with 2 or more children
4 bedroom 6 person	Couple or one adult families with 3 or more children
Over 4 bedroom	Couple or one adult families with 4 or more children

The following principles will apply when allocating housing:

- Children of the same sex may share a room unless there is an age difference of five years or more.
- Children of different sexes qualify for a separate bedroom at the age of seven.

- No more than two children to share a bedroom.
- Adults sharing accommodation but not living together as a couple will be offered separate rooms.
- Joint tenancies are given to couples or to single sharers as long as they are joint applicants or nominated jointly.

In specially adapted accommodation or supported accommodation these principals may be waived to meet demand or medical requirements (i.e. elderly couple requiring separate rooms).

In all cases these principles may need to be waived in exceptional circumstances to meet acute and demonstrable need.

10. The Lettings Process

All offers of accommodation are made in writing.

Applicants, nominees, referrals and exchanges are given the opportunity to view the accommodation in which they are interested before deciding whether to accept the offer or not.

The signing of the tenancy agreement can either take place in the Society's offices or at another convenient site. Tenants are provided with full information about the property, including service charge liability, the agreement itself and details of local amenities.

Applications will be rejected or suspended in respect of reasonable offers made, in line with the procedures outlined above.

11. Appeals

Applicants who are dissatisfied with their treatment at any stage of the re-housing process will have their complaint dealt with promptly and fairly.

If people wish to challenge any decision made in connection with their housing application they have the right to have a review of the decision and in this first instance should direct this to the Housing Manager. If the matter is not resolved the applicant should use the Society's adopted complaints procedure.

The procedure does not prevent anyone from seeking independent help or advice from independent advice agencies, such as Citizens Advice.

12. Monitoring

The Society will monitor all its allocations to ensure that it is meeting its expressed targets contained within this policy and within its race and diversity strategy. It will report this annually to Board

13. Responsibility

This policy is the responsibility of the Housing Manager and Chief Executive

14. Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years to ensure best practice.

South Western Housing Society
Allocations and Lettings – Points Scheme

Points will be awarded following completion of an application form and a home visit as follows.

A BEDSPACES

Under this criteria bedrooms must be identified as having either 2 bed spaces or 1 bed space.

- A 2-bed space room must have sufficient space for a double bed or 2 singles, normal bedroom furniture and space to walk around.
- A 1-bed space room is the same as above but with room for a single bed only.

B BED SPACE DEFICIENCY

Points are awarded for the lack of bed spaces available in the accommodation.

A separate bedroom should be available for each of the following and where this is not provided the following points will be awarded:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Husband & Wife | 7 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Co-habiting Couples (including same sex or transgender households) | 7 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lone Parent | 7 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Single Adult (person aged 18 or over) | 7 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A child, who of necessity has to share a bedroom with a person and there is a considerable age difference | 7 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Where a member of the household is expecting a child and there is no bed space for that child when it arrives according to the above standard. | 7 |

A bedroom should be provided for each child except where there are:

- 2 children of the same sex who are able to share
- 2 children of opposite sex under the age of 8 years

For each bed space deficient according to this standard 7

C LACK OF FACILITIES

Note: Households including someone who is expecting a child will be awarded family points

	Family	Couple/Single
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of Living Room	6	4
<input type="checkbox"/> Share Living Room with relatives	4	2
<input type="checkbox"/> Share Living Room with others	5	3
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of Kitchen	7	5
<input type="checkbox"/> Share Kitchen with relatives	4	3
<input type="checkbox"/> Share Kitchen with others	5	4
<input type="checkbox"/> Share WC with relatives	4	3
<input type="checkbox"/> Share WC with others	5	4
<input type="checkbox"/> External WC only	6	5
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of Bath/Shower Room	7	5
<input type="checkbox"/> Share Bath/Shower with relatives	4	3
<input type="checkbox"/> Share Bath/Shower with others	5	4
§ Kitchen/Living Room combined (with no separate lounge constitutes "Lack of Living Room")		
§ A Bed-sit which comprises Sleeping/Living Room area constitutes "Lack of Living Room"		

§ A Bed-sit which comprises Sleeping/Living Room/Kitchen constitutes "Lack of Living Room and Bed Space"

D LACK OF BASIC AMENITIES

Awarded to take account of unfit or substandard accommodation

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | No running cold water | 2 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | No toilet | 2 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | No inside toilet | 1 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | No bathroom | 1 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | No kitchen | 1 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | No hot water | 1 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | No heating | 2 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Electric fires | 1 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Portable gas heaters | 2 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Partial central heating | 1 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | OAP or disabled with no internal downstairs toilet | 1 |

E LACK OF AMENITIES

- | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Lack of suitable garden
There must be an enclosed, safe area for a child to play. In applications purely for adults or where children are older, no points apply. | 1 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Lack of outside clothes drying area
The household must have space for an exterior drying area. | 1 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Isolated Property | 2 |

Awarded if the property has no public transport or shop within walking distance and applicant has no transport.

- Difficult Access** 2
Awarded if access to property is a long rough road or if there is no road, or if steps up to or down from a property are particularly difficult for applicant (excluding medical reasons).

F PROPERTY CONDITION

Lack of repair likely to endanger health, e.g.

- Poor insulation 1.5
- Extensive damp penetration 1.5
- Infestation 1.5
- Dangerous electrical installations 4
- Structural instability or serious disrepair 4
- Presence of asbestos 4

Double the above points if over state retirement age or child under 5 years

G MEDICAL WELFARE

Awarded where re-housing would improve health or welfare or where present accommodation is likely to cause deterioration of health or welfare.

- Medical problems 2.5
- Serious Medical problems supported by medical evidence 5
- Awarded to households consisting of someone who has an extreme or particular need for re-housing on medical or welfare grounds and who cannot reasonably be expected to find suitable accommodation for themselves in the foreseeable future. These points will be awarded to applicants where it is considered that they have an urgent need to transfer to more suitable accommodation. To be 10

awarded based on medical evidence supplied by the applicants medical or welfare advisors.

H EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

- Awarded according to reasonable distance and travel circumstances between applicants home and main place of employment. 3
- Households in receipt of and dependant on means tested state benefits of who are wholly reliant on state pensions and whose economic circumstances lead to difficulty in getting settled accommodation. 5
- Households where economic circumstances lead to difficulty in obtaining settled accommodation. 5

I RESIDENCE NEED

Only one to be awarded

Awarded where applicant has a clear housing need to live in a particular town or village of their first choice for:

- Employment 5
- To give or receive support 5
- Leaving HM Forces 5
- Special Circumstances 5
(appropriate evidence will be required)

J TEMPORARY OR INSECURE ACCOMMODATION

Only one to be awarded

- Roofless 15
- Staying with friends/family/lodger 15
- Bed and Breakfast/Hostel 15
- Refuge 15

- Tied tenancies which are due to cease 5
- Threat of eviction or repossession within 28 days (does not apply to tenants of Registered Social Landlord or Local Authorities) 5
- Length of time on Housing Register (one point per year) 1

K SEPARATE Households

Households who are forced to live apart where:

- There are no children 2
- The woman is pregnant 3
- There are children 5

Custody would require confirmation from a Social Worker or Solicitor. The Society will consider same sex and transgender couples as households.

L VIOLENCE/HARASSMENT/SEXUAL/HARASSMENT

- Verbal violence/nuisance/harassment 5
- Physical violence/harassment 10
- Domestic violence – could be mental or physical 10
- Racial Harassment on grounds of gender, transphobic harassment or on grounds of disability or religion 10

M ENVIRONMENTAL

Household living above first floor

- Families above 1st floor with no lift 1
- With children under 5 years (per child) 0.5
- With children 5-10 years (per child) 0.5