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ALLOCATIONS POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

Prospect Community Housing (Prospect) aims to provide good quality homes in attractive, safe environments where people choose to live.

From 1 April 2008, Prospect will participate in the Edindex choice based lettings scheme. Our available properties will be advertised in the Evening News as well as on the Key to Choice website. Any applicant who is registered on Edindex will be able to bid for our available properties. The policy document sets out the priority that applicants are awarded depending on their circumstances, and how we allocate our properties.

This allocation policy complies with the requirements of the Housing (Scotland) 2001 Act, and also follows good practice as set out in Performance Standards and Raising Standards.

2. WHO CAN APPLY?

2.1. General

An open list is maintained which means that anyone of 16 years or older may apply at any time. Only applicants who have registered with Edindex will be able to bid for our advertised properties.

2.2. Specialist Housing

Since amenity housing is particularly suitable for the elderly, any applicants wishing to be considered for this housing should normally be 50 years or older. This housing will also be available to younger individuals who would particularly benefit from it on medical or vulnerability grounds.

Wheelchair housing will similarly be restricted to those who have restricted mobility and require this specialist accommodation.

Similar restrictions may be introduced for other types of property at the discretion of the Housing Manager.

2.3. Owner Occupiers

Owner Occupiers may apply for Prospect housing. However, at the point of allocation they will be required to sign a declaration agreeing to sell their property within a reasonable time scale and accept the Prospect property as their only or principal home.

2.4. Tenants in Arrears

All current or former tenants of Prospect or another landlord with an existing arrears of over 1 months rent are required to have established an agreement with their landlord to pay these arrears and to have maintained it for 3 months. Proof will be required of this. If the arrears are under 1 month of rent, this is disregarded when considering the applicant for a vacancy. 'Arrears' covers rent arrears and any other housing related debt e.g. re-chargeable repairs.

Where applicants have existing arrears, which require to be addressed, they will be bypassed for any accommodation that they are shortlisted for. The applicant will be advised in writing why they have been bypassed and what they have to do to be considered for offers in the future.

The exception to the above are applicants with homeless priority. For these cases arrears have to be disregarded to comply with the Housing (Scotland) 2001 Act provisions for section 5 referrals.

2.5. Anti-Social Tenants

Where an applicant's existing, or previous, landlord has had to take action against them for serious anti-social behaviour the decision to allocate a tenancy to them will be at the discretion of the Housing Manager.

2.6. Prospect Members and Staff

Members of Prospect, including Committee Members, receive no special priority for housing but may apply like any other individual. However, if a Committee Member, staff member or close relative receives enough points to be allocated a house, the allocation must be agreed by the Management Committee.

3. HOW TO APPLY?

3.1. Direct Applications

People can apply to Prospect by completing and submitting an EdIndex application form. EdIndex forms are available from Prospect's office and other social landlords within Edinburgh. Once an Edindex application has been processed, the applicant is able to bid for properties that Prospect advertises.

3.2. City of Edinburgh Council Nominees

Council Nominations and Section 5 Referrals have been suspended for Housing Associations adopting choice based lettings. Housing Associations operating choice will be fulfilling their obligations under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 towards homeless households through the silver priority given under the choice system.

3.3. Referral Agreements

The Prospect Management Committee may also choose to enter into nomination or referral agreements with other organisations. Properties identified as suitable for a referral applicant will not be advertised.

3.4. Management Transfers

In situations where there is an urgent requirement to move a tenant, or where we would want to move a tenant so their property is freed up for someone else, a Management Transfer can be approved by the Housing Manager. Where a property is identified as

being suitable for a management transfer, the property will not be advertised. Examples of where a Management transfer may be approved are:

- Tenants who are suffering from severe harassment or other reason which means that they cannot remain in their current property
- Tenants who are under-occupying their property and agree to a move
- Referrals from other Housing Associations who have a tenant in urgent need of a move (these would be agreed on a reciprocal basis)

4. HOW ARE PROPERTIES ALLOCATED?

4.1. General

Prospect will operate the Choice Based Lettings system that has been developed and agreed through Edindex. Most properties that we have available for let will be advertised. Properties will not be advertised when they are used for a management transfers, referral applicants, or other urgent situations that are approved by the Housing Manager.

The details of how the choice system operates, closing date for bids etc can be found in the Evening News publication each Monday and on the Key to Choice website. We have free copies of the Evening News insert in our office for applicants to use.

Prospect will not accept paper bids on behalf of applicants, although we will assist in the bidding process and applicants can use the computer terminal in Prospect's reception to enter their bids. The closing date/time for bids is not negotiable – any late bids will not be considered.

4.2. Occupancy Standards

An applicant's occupancy requirements will be assessed against the following 'normal' occupancy levels:

2 person bedroom for	- couples - single parents - single applicants - 2 mixed-sex children under 8 years - 2 same-sex children under 14 years
1 person bedroom for	- all others

Where medical conditions require alternative occupancy levels this will be considered on a case to case basis. Evidence may be required before a larger property will be approved.

Children involved in custody cases will be considered as permanent members of a household where regular access can be proved (i.e. at least 2 overnights per week or 8 weeks per year).

In these circumstances it will be considered acceptable for all children, irrespective of age, to share a living/bedroom with another children or adult of the same sex. Children over the age of 8 will not be expected to share with someone of the opposite sex.

Properties will usually be allocated to allow normal occupancy levels, as set out above.

Allocations to 1 person more or less than normal will be permitted, in family accommodation (not 2 and 3 person properties) where the applicant requests this in writing.

In cases of greater overcrowding/under occupation an allocation will be at the discretion of the Housing Manager and must be agreed to in writing by the applicant.

4.3. Priority awards

Households can be awarded a priority status, depending on their circumstances. Priority status can be awarded to either starter or movers as set out below. The priority categories are as follows:

Gold Priority

Gold priority is awarded when the current property does not meet, and cannot be adapted, the housing needs of the applicant or a member of their household. This is only awarded after an assessment by CEC staff.

Gold priority (urgent) is only awarded in exceptional circumstances, for example to enable a hospital discharge. This priority is also awarded to prevent long term hospital and care home admissions and forms part of a wider support and care package. It is CEC staff who award this priority to an applicant.

Silver Priority

This level of priority can be awarded for different reasons

- Homeless and in priority need. This can be awarded to starter households. CEC staff award this priority following a homeless assessment.
- Overcrowded households. This will be awarded to households that require :
 - a) Two more bedrooms to adequately house their family in accordance with the Occupancy standards described at 4.2 above.
 - b) At least one extra bedroom if they are currently housed in one bedroom accommodation and have one or more children under the age of 16.

Overcrowding priority is will be awarded automatically when an application is input onto the Edindex computer system. The priority will be verified if an applicant comes up for an offer.

- Under occupation. Households occupying 3 or more bedroom houses who no longer require that size of home and are willing to move to smaller accommodation, should contact their local neighbourhood office or Housing Association to discuss this in detail. This only applies to tenants of the Council, Housing Associations and Housing Co-operatives.
- Where rehousing is required due to demolition or regeneration works in an area. This can be awarded to starter or mover households. Priority is awarded by CEC staff.
- Exceptional housing need. This can be awarded to either starter or mover households but will only be awarded following an assessment by an Officer Panel. This may also include people living in Below Tolerable Standard housing (usually lacking basic amenities such as hot water supply or no kitchen) and people living in

unacceptable circumstances. The Officer Panel will comprise staff from CEC and Housing Associations.

4.4 Ranking Priority

The order of priority is as follows with highest at the top

- Priority - Gold, Urgent
- Priority - Gold
- Priority - Silver
- Non priority - Waiting Time/ Length of time in last tenancy

All priority cases will be ranked by date of award of priority. Non priority cases will be ranked by date of application for starters and length of time at current address for movers.

Where a person/household would be eligible for more than one category of priority the highest level only will apply. Unless otherwise stipulated priority will apply to available property citywide.

4.5 Time limited Priority

Priority is awarded to reflect the need for urgent rehousing. As such the priority granted will be time limited and may be removed where it has not been used reasonably or where a property successfully bid for has been refused. Where priority has been removed then the household is free to continue to bid through "EH Your Key to Choice" but without priority status.

Gold Priority will be time limited but on a flexible basis as households are more likely to be dependant on a suitable type of property which may take time to become available. Priority will be reviewed on a regular basis and where households are not making reasonable use of priority or have refused a suitable property then priority may be removed.

As Gold priority is granted following an assessment, some cases may have a recommendation attached to its use e.g. for ground floor accommodation only in line with assessed need. This is to ensure any property offered meets, or can be adapted to meet, the family's housing need.

Silver priority for homelessness will be awarded for 6 advert cycles and then reviewed. Where the priority has not been used reasonably i.e. a household has not made a range of bids likely to result in rehousing or has refused a property they have successfully bid for and which meets their needs then the priority may be removed

Silver Priority for Demolition or Regeneration

This will be awarded on a time limited basis in line with timescales for the regeneration work in question. The tests of reasonableness will again apply. In some cases the priority awarded may be limited to specific geographic areas or house types.

Silver Priority for Overcrowding

This will not be time limited as there is an acute shortage of larger homes. However the extra value gained by the age award (time) will be limited at 12 months. Any household being considered for an offer of accommodation will be visited at home to verify that their circumstances still qualify them for this award.

4.6 Starters/Movers

After an application has been input, the applicant will be placed into one of two categories automatically based on the information supplied in their application form.

Movers – those who currently have a tenancy with a social landlord or who own their own home.

Starters – any applicant who does not fit into the mover category. This will include homeless applicants, private rented tenants, those staying with family/friends etc.

Prospect will apply quota groups to decide which properties will be advertised as starters, movers or starter and mover. We will also have a proportion of properties where preference will be given to Prospect tenants.

The starter/mover/transfer quotas will be reviewed each year as part of the Lettings Plan.

4.7 Accepting an Offer

When an applicant is offered a property, a suitable viewing appointment will be arranged and applicants will normally be expected to respond to an offer within 3 days. Failure to respond can result in withdrawal of the offer.

5. MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

5.1. Lettings Plan

Prospect will produce an annual lettings plan (this will be available to applicants) which will contain the following information:

- Anticipated allocations, including new housing
- Quotas for starters/movers/transfers
- Quotas for any special referral agreements
- Any restrictions or quota variations being applied to particular areas or types of housing

5.2. Home Visits and References

Prospect staff will carry out an applicant visit before an offer of accommodation is made. This visit can either be at the applicants home or in the office. Wherever possible and practical these should be home visits.

Applicants are not required to provide personal references but their current and/or former landlords will be contacted to confirm factual information about their tenancy. An applicant's permission will always be obtained before the landlord is contacted and any decision not to allocate due to information received will be at the discretion of the Housing Manager.

5.3. Monitoring and Review

It is Prospect's policy to allocate houses only on the basis of housing needs. We will not unfairly discriminate against any individual, household or group on the grounds of sex or marital status, on racial grounds, or on grounds of disability, age, sexual orientation, language or social origin, or other personal attributes, including beliefs or opinions such as religious beliefs or political opinions.

5.4. Cancellation

Prospect will not cancel applicants from the list, as this will have an effect on other landlords using Edindex. If we believe an application should be cancelled, we will pass the information to Edindex who will decide based on their published policy whether the applicant should be cancelled for all landlords.

5.5. Appeals

For any complaints/appeals that are connected with how Prospect staff have handled a situation, or decisions that Prospect have made, Prospect's Complaints Policy applies. Any complaint/appeal regarding the processing of an application or the awarding of priority should be directed directly to Edindex who have their own complaints/appeals procedure. A copy of the Edindex complaints/appeals process is available from Prospect.

5.6. Transfers

Prospect tenants may be considered for a transfer to alternative Prospect accommodation providing they have lived at their existing address for at least 6 months, or in exceptional cases, at the discretion of the Housing Manager.

Transfer requests will only be considered from complete households, except in the case of marital breakdown, and all transfer applicants will be assessed using the same policy as external applicants.

A proportion of advertised properties will give preference to existing Prospect tenants. This will be set out in our annual Lettings Plan, which is approved by Prospect's Management Committee.

Prior to an allocation, a transfer applicant will be expected to bring their current house up to a lettable standard.

5.7. Exchanges

Prospect tenants may exchange with another Prospect tenant or with tenants of a Local Authority, another Housing Association, co-operative or registered social landlord provided the incoming tenant meets Prospect's required standards with regard to rent arrears, anti-social behaviour and occupancy levels.

Tenants must not exchange houses without Prospect's written permission. Anyone wishing further information should ask for a copy of Prospect's Mobility Policy.

5.8. Buying a Prospect House

Applicants should note that tenants do not have the right to buy their Prospect house.

5.9. Housing Benefit Entitlement

Applicants should note that Housing Benefit is available (depending on income and circumstances) to Prospect tenants in order to assist them with rent payments. Anyone wishing to discuss their eligibility should contact Prospect staff.

6. MONITORING AND REVIEW

Monitoring of the day to day operation of the Allocations Policy will be the responsibility of the Housing Manager who will ensure the fair treatment of applicants.

The Management Committee will review the operation of the policy on an annual basis to ensure that it continues to effectively to operate effectively.

Review approved by Management Committee on 27 February 2008

Signed.....Date.....
(Chairperson)