



## Allocations policy

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### 1 Introduction

The allocations policy sets out how Alamo Housing Co-operative will allocate empty homes. The policy applies to any homes we own and to those we manage on behalf of other landlords.

Although very few of the properties we manage become vacant each year, we aim to let those that do in accordance with the first co-operative principle, that of open membership. We also aim to comply with our *Equality and Diversity Policy*.

Properties will be allocated on the basis of housing need, but we will also ask applicants to demonstrate that they are willing to accept the responsibilities of co-operative membership. This is sometimes known as “co-operability”.

If we have signed nominations agreements with local authorities or landlords, our management committee and staff (or agents) will ensure that we comply with them. We will also comply with the terms of the management agreements under which we manage homes on behalf of other landlords.

Any member or employee who uses their influence or office in the co-operative to secure housing for themselves, their family or friends, or for any person, whether or not in return for money, will be acting in breach of this policy and may also be committing a criminal offence. The member will also be held to have acted in breach of the *Code of Conduct*.

### 2 The responsibilities of membership - “co-operability”

The first co-operative principle is that cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to everyone who is able to use their services and is willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

As a housing co-operative, we need members who are committed, and who have relevant skills or are willing to acquire them. We will ask everyone who applies to our co-operative, including people nominated by the local authority, to demonstrate that they are willing and able to participate and to contribute to our organisation.

We will not require specific experience from applicants, but we may take into consideration relevant skills and experience when deciding between applicants with similar housing needs. If we have good reason to believe that an applicant is not co-operable, we will have the right to reject the application.

### 3 Housing need

Housing need will always be our main consideration when we allocate empty properties. Although there are many types of housing need, we will usually consider the following to be most important:

- A need to move because of harassment or violence, including domestic violence.
- Under-occupation (particularly if subject to the bedroom tax).
- Homelessness.
- Disability or long-term illness (especially if this means the member's home is unsuitable).
- Overcrowding.
- Poor housing conditions - including a lack of basic facilities.
- Low income.



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### 4 Keeping allocations fair – the pointing scheme

Alamo Housing Co-operative is committed to ensuring that we operate a fair and transparent allocations policy.

In order to keep things fair, every applicant, including local authority nominees, applicants to the waiting list, and transfer applicants, will be asked to complete an application form. The form will then be used to assess the applicant's priority based on our *Pointing Scheme*.

We use a pointing scheme to make sure that every applicant is treated fairly and that everyone knows what to expect when they make their application. The pointing scheme applies equally to new applicants and to members who need to move to another property.

Under the pointing scheme, we award points for each aspect of housing need so we can make a fair and transparent decision as to which applicant has the highest priority. When an empty property becomes available, we will always offer it to the applicant with the highest priority, provided that the applicant is also co-operable.

The pointing scheme may be amended from time to time to reflect the changing needs of our local community, but members must be consulted on any changes, and the new scheme must be approved by a general meeting.

### 5 Nominations agreements

Alamo Housing Co-operative manages homes owned by landlords which are housing associations. Because some of these homes were built or refurbished using government grants, we may sometimes enter into agreements with either the landlord or the local authority under which they have the right to nominate applicants for empty properties. The terms of these agreements are variable.

The management committee must approve the allocation of any property to every household nominated by the local authority or another landlord. If we consider that the property is not suited to the applicant, or if we believe that the applicant will not accept the responsibilities of membership, we may reject their application and ask the council to nominate someone else. However, if we reject someone we will always give a reason for our decision.

### 6 The waiting list

Alamo Housing Co-operative will keep a waiting list. The list may be opened and closed from time to time in order to maintain a sufficient pool from which to choose new members. The decision to open or close the list must be taken by the management committee.

The committee must also make, or approve, the decision to accept an applicant onto the waiting list. Applicants will be expected to regularly confirm that they still wish to be considered for rehousing.

In order to contribute towards meeting local housing needs, the co-operative may form partnerships with local agencies which offer support to groups of people with specific needs, and allow them to refer people to our waiting list. Any such arrangements must be approved by the management committee. Applicants referred by partner agencies will be assessed in the same way as other applicants.

The criteria for acceptance onto the waiting list will be:

- A long standing connection to one of the boroughs in which we manage property; and
- Homeless or living in insecure housing; and
- The ability to sustain a tenancy in unsupported accommodation.

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### 7 Transfers

Alamo Housing Co-operative aims to do its best, subject to the limited resources we have available, to assist members who need to move to more suitable accommodation. When a property falls vacant, it will usually be made available to existing members who have applied for a transfer and have been accepted onto the waiting list.

The management committee must make, or approve, the decision to accept a member onto the transfer list. Members will be able to apply to move to another home within the co-operative if they meet one of the following conditions:

- Be overcrowding or under-occupying their current home; or
- Living in a home that is not suitable because of the member's health or disability; or
- At risk in their present home due to the threat of physical or mental violence, including harassment and domestic violence; or
- Have another exceptional need that requires them to move to a different home.

Members will not normally be entitled to apply for a transfer if they have:

- Arrears of rent; or
- Been responsible for causing significant anti-social behaviour; or
- Intentionally worsened their situation to qualify for a transfer; or
- Provided false information to support their application to transfer; or
- Damaged or neglected their current home.

However, the committee may decide to waive this rule if there are exceptional reasons - for instance if the member is vulnerable or if there is a risk to their health.

### 8 Reciprocal arrangements

A "reciprocal arrangement" is one in which our co-operative agrees to house someone who is a tenant of another landlord, whilst in return the other landlord (or the council) agrees to house one of our members.

Reciprocal arrangements involve properties of a similar size and type and so do not reduce the stock of housing available to members who are waiting for a transfer. Only in exceptional circumstances will an arrangement be made which results in the loss of a transfer opportunity for existing members.

The management committee may agree a reciprocal arrangement if this will benefit a member who has a significant housing need. The committee may also delegate this responsibility to employed staff. However the incoming tenant must be interviewed and approved by the committee in the same manner as any other applicant.

### 9 Housing Under 18s

Alamo Housing Co-operative does not normally provide accommodation to people under 18 years old. If we do make an offer to a younger applicant, it will be subject to an *Equitable Tenancy Agreement*, and an adult will be required to stand as guarantor. The adult will usually be a parent or guardian, but may also be a representative of the local authority.

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### 10 Mutual exchanges

Most members of Alamo Housing Co-operative are also tenants of a housing association. These members will usually have a legal right to carry out a "mutual exchange" with a qualifying tenant of a housing association or local authority. Members living in shared properties, and those who hold assured tenancy agreements or licenses, are not entitled to exchange.

There are a number of restrictions on the right to exchange. Either landlord may refuse if one of the tenants is in rent arrears; if either has damaged or neglected their current home; if one household is too large or too small for a property; or If there has been persistent antisocial behaviour.

### 11 Properties suitable for people for limited mobility

Some of the homes we manage may be specifically designed or adapted to meet the needs of people with limited mobility, including wheelchair users. Others may simply have level access or relatively few steps. Homes of this type are always in short supply.

We will always aim to let homes suitable for people with limited mobility to those members who will benefit most from their facilities.

### 12 Timescales

The following time-scales will apply to the allocations procedure:

#### **Applications to the waiting list**

The management committee will consider applications for housing within 30 days of receipt. The applicant will be advised immediately a decision has been taken.

#### **Notification of vacant property**

The co-op manager will notify all members by post or email or any vacant property which is to be offered to waiting list or transfer applicants with 7 days of the property becoming vacant.

#### **Offers of accommodation**

The management committee will allocate vacant properties within 21 days of the void date. The successful applicant will be notified immediately by telephone or post.

#### **Acceptance / refusal of offers**

Housing and transfer applicants will have 24 hours to notify Alamo Housing Co-operative of their decision to accept or refuse an offer of accommodation.

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### 12 Appeals

Empty homes will always be allocated to the applicant with the highest priority as determined by our pointing scheme. We use a pointing scheme to minimise discretion on the part of committee members and staff and to promote fairness.

However, we recognise that sometimes we may get things wrong, and our appeals process is designed to allow applicants of all types to:

- Dispute matters of fact which may affect the scoring of their application; and
- Ask for a review of any points which have been awarded on a discretionary basis.

Appeals must be made as soon as the applicant becomes aware of the matter which they are disputing. If possible appeals should be made in writing (by letter or email).

Appeals will be considered by the committee, which will aim to make a decision and respond to the applicant within 14 days of receiving the appeal. In certain circumstances, we may hold a property void pending the committee's decision on the appeal.

### 13 Recording, monitoring and reporting

An annual lettings report, showing all the homes let over the course of the year, will be presented to the annual general meeting (or to another general meeting).

Every letting will be reported to the committee at the first available opportunity. The committee may also elect to receive other lettings information and statistics at more frequent intervals.

We will report lettings information, include profile information, to the landlords of our properties as required by the relevant management agreement.

We will also report all new lettings to the Homes and Community Agency (HCA) using the CORE recording system.

### 14 Policy review

This policy will be reviewed annually. It will also be reviewed if there are changes to relevant legislation or to the regulatory framework.