

SSHHC Housing Allocation Policy

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SOUTHSEA (SELFHELP) HOUSING CO-OPERATIVE

POLICY DOCUMENT (Approved 17/9/2012)

1. INTRODUCTION

This document sets out the revised and updated SSHHC policy governing:

- a) Application for Prospective Membership of the Housing Co-operative.
(Sections 4 and 5)
- b) Allocation to future housing vacancies within the Housing Co-operative.
(Section 6)

The aim of the revision is to agree a clear and consistent application and allocations process which meets with legal requirements, and is in line with current best practice for Housing Co-operatives.

The desired outcome is to successfully recruit future Members who will fully understand the meaning of Co-operative Housing at SSHHC, and who are able and willing to meet their commitment to participate and contribute to the continuation of SSHHC as an organisation.

This policy revision was published to Members for group discussion at the Special General meeting of 17th September 2012, which was open to all full Members of the SSHHC. It has been revised and updated in accordance with the wishes of the Membership, and agreed by vote.

2. BACKGROUND

This policy revision is conducted by demand of the Management Committee Meeting of 15th August 2011, where it was decided by the Membership that the existing Allocations Procedure had broken down. It was therefore agreed that the relevant policy and procedures needed to be thoroughly overhauled and updated.

This document takes account of Members' criticisms of aspects of the current approach to the application and allocation Process within SSHHC and, crucially, of the existing system's failure to consistently recruit genuinely co-operative Member- tenants to join the organisation.

Members' suggestions that previously abandoned practices be reinstated are addressed here. The document also draws upon research into best Practice which was undertaken by members of the 'Allocations, Policy-Writing Sub-Committee.'

3. PRINCIPLES

Community Housing - SSHHC aims to offer affordable, secure and safe social housing. The Co-operative therefore seeks to make allocations which will enable Members to live in harmony, and enjoy peace within their own environment.

Co-operability - all Members of SSHHC must fully understand and comply with the principles of Co-operative living and active Participation, as outlined within the SSHHC Tenancy Agreement and Rule Book.

Equal Opportunities – all Applicants and Prospective Members will have equal access to the relevant information regarding SSHHC, and have equal access to any additional guidance relating to the application and allocations processes.

Confidentiality – disclosures of personal circumstances will be sought by SSHHC from all Applicants. Any information shared with SSHHC by housing Applicants and Prospective Members will be treated as strictly confidential by the Management Committee and all existing Members of SSHCC in accordance with the Confidentiality Policy.

Communication-all applications will be responded to in a timely manner, and all Applicants and Prospective Members will be kept fully informed and updated throughout the selection process.

Internal Democracy – all (full) members of SSHHC will have the opportunity to discuss and vote on applications for prospective membership. Allocations will be on the basis of a points system and (full) members will ratify decisions by a vote based on the points allocated. The allocation points should only be challenged on a technical basis.

4. SELECTION OF PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS

- a) All application forms are taken to the Management Committee Meeting.
- b) Applicants are invited to introduce themselves at the Management meeting. Any of their replies can be read out by the Allocations Officer.

ELIGIBILITYCRITERIA

Must know what a housing co-operative is and show some understanding of how it works.

Demonstrate a willingness to take on the responsibilities of full membership. This should include one or more of the following options:

- a) Previous experience of co-operative living.
- b) Experience of any voluntary work.

- c) Experience of any paid work in the voluntary or community sector.

In housing need.

PARTICIPATION CRITERIA–

Attendance at 3monthly meetings prior to consideration as a Prospective Member.

Attendance at a minimum of 6monthly meetings in first year of Prospective Membership.

Attendance at a minimum of 4monthly meetings per year thereafter (in line with participation expectations for full members).

5. APPLICATION PROCEDURES

APPLICATION

All Applicants will receive guidance on the objectives of SSHHC, the Prospective Membership system, and future participation requirements.

The application form and guidance notes will be published on the SSHHC Website, and can either be downloaded and printed by the Applicant, or be forwarded to Prospective Members by the Membership Officer.

The application form will ask a series of standard questions relating to the Applicant's eligibility for housing, their ability to undertake Prospective Membership and their willingness to commit to full Participation if housed.

All application forms must be completed in full with all questions answered.

Applicantswillbeaskedtomakeadeclarationthattheinformationtheyhave provided is true and accurate to the best of their knowledge.

Where Applicants or Prospective Members have failed to make full disclosure as requested, their application may be withdrawn.

All SSHHC Members will be encouraged to contribute to discussions relating to the selection of Prospective Members.

The Membership will vote to accept or reject an Applicant for Prospective Membership, based on all the information available.

Applicants will be expected to demonstrate a willingness to participate in the running of the cooperative by attendance at a number of meetings prior to their acceptance as a prospective member.

PROSPECTIVE MEMBERSHIP

Prospective Members will remain in a 'Pool' of candidates until a suitable housing vacancy becomes available.

All Prospective Members will be required to demonstrate commitment to the principles of Co-operative living in line with the Participation Criteria above until their selection to a housing vacancy.

Prospective Members will be granted limited access to the SSHHC Website, to enable them to review and/or update their application details whilst waiting for suitable accommodation.

Prospective Members will be provided with contact details for the Membership Officer, who will serve as a point of contact for all enquires during the interim period.

Applicants will be contacted at regular intervals by the Membership Officer. There will be pre-set timescales within which SSHHC will review all applications and vacancies.

6. ALLOCATIONS TO VACANT HOUSING

POINTSSYSTEM- Individuals remaining in the 'Pool' of Prospective Members will be awarded points towards allocation based upon:

Prospective Member's current level of housing need.

Prospective Member's record of participation.

Prospective Member's history of participation in voluntary activities (this could include other housing cooperatives, voluntary organisations, charities, community associations and other community-based organisations).

Points will be allocated by a panel of three members of the cooperative in strict accordance with the policy. The allocation of points will be reviewed on a periodic basis by the panel, the members of the panel must not know any of the applicants or prospective members prior to their application, and will be appointed by the management committee in the normal way (in the event of there being more than three disinterested volunteers and open vote will be taken to determine the composition of the panel). **The panel membership may be changed regularly to avoid any bias.**

INTERNAL TRANSFERS

Current full members will be entitled to apply for transfer within the Co-op, but must apply before any vacancies occur – applications will not be considered if they are received after a vacancy has occurred.

Requests for Internal transfer will be given priority over and above the allocation of Prospective Members, provided the transfer eligibility criteria have been met by the internal applicant.

Eligibility for internal transfer will be considered in light of current circumstances, under/over occupancy, and in accordance with rent arrears Policy and participation record.

When a full Member has been internally transferred to another property, the Member will automatically be removed from the internal transfer list. If they wish to transfer again at a later date, they will need to reapply.

VOTING PROCESS

All full Members will be eligible to vote upon:

- a) The recruitment of Prospective Membership to SSHHC
- b) The allocation of prospective members to vacant properties where more than one prospective member has the same number of points
- c) When a full Member is already accepted on the transfer list to do a transfer to a suitable property if eligible. The internal transfer list remains confidential.

Voting on allocations will be conducted at a pre-arranged 'Allocations Meeting' through the process of a closed ballot.

Prospective Members will not be eligible to contribute to discussions, or vote, upon allocations to vacant properties or units, or prospective membership.

7. RESPONDING TO COMPLAINTS

RIGHT OF COMPLAINT

SSHHC seeks to take a fully equitable and progressive approach when handling potential complaints within the Application or Allocations process, whether these originate with Applicants, Members or Prospective Members.

RECORDING

Potential complainants will be required to forward any complaint (which relates to the Application or Allocations process) in writing and submit this either to the SSHHC Membership Officer or to the Chairperson.

All complaints and/or counter-complaints will be formally recorded and logged by the receiving Officer.

Any additional involved parties will be informed in writing that a complaint has been made to the SSHHC Membership Officer or Chairperson.

FURTHER ACTION

The response to complaints relating to Application and Allocations Process will depend upon the nature and substance of the complaint.

2 stage response will be to:

- a) Forward the complaint to the Management Committee for investigation and/or further action.
- b) Forward the complaint to an appropriate external body for adjudication should the complainant remain dissatisfied with the outcome.

CONSENT

Any information provided by Applicants, Members or Prospective Members
Will only be shared with an external body with the involved party's written consent.

8. MONITORING

TRANSPARENCY

The finalized Allocations Policy will be published in full on the SSHHC Website.

SSHHC will continue to liaise with an appropriate external agency to ensure that the Allocations Policy adheres to current regulations, and meets recommendations for best practice in Co-operative Housing.

ENCOURAGING FEEDBACK

All Applicants and Prospective Members will be invited to provide written feedback pertaining to their experience of the recruitment and allocations process.

The SSHHC Membership Officer or Chair Person will record feedback and raise points for discussion at the next available Management Committee Meeting.

MEMBERSHIP SUPPORT

A new role of Membership Support Officer to be created to facilitate training opportunities and report to Management Committee where existing members are failing to achieve the minimum levels of participation in the activities of the Co-operative.

SOUTHSEA SELF-HELP HOUSING CO-OPERATIVE

Introduction

The proposed new allocations policy's underlying ethos is to identify as best we can potential applicants that are likely to become involved in the running of the Co-op. We believe that this can be demonstrated via a track record, but also through stipulating attendance at meetings by potential members. Because of this it would be unreasonable not to expect the same minimum standards from existing members, therefore in conjunction with proposing the new allocations policy we are also resurrecting the idea of a tenant participation policy. This idea is not new and was proposed a number of years ago and a draft policy was drawn up by the then Membership Officer, Kay Peggs. Unfortunately, due to some poor legal advice received the Co-op did not proceed to implement this policy at that time. Much of what follows is a restatement of the principles of that previous draft.

Framework

1. The proposed new allocations policy sets out a minimum attendance for a second-year prospective member of four meetings per annum. It is proposed that this will be the minimum criteria to be applied to existing members, as it would be unreasonable for the Co-op to expect prospective members to do more than existing members.
2. It is recognised that it may not always be possible for people to attend meetings on a set day of the month, therefore consideration should be given to changing the established practice if it can be seen that this will result in more members being able to attend. Also, participation should not be seen purely in terms of attendance at meetings, other forms of participation need to be recognised and identified for those who cannot for very good reason make evening meetings.
3. It is also recognised that the meetings themselves need to be improved, both in terms of conduct, but also in terms of members understanding of the business being transacted and what is expected of them. The co-op already has an adopted set of Standing Orders and these should be enforced to ensure that meetings are run in an orderly fashion.
4. To this end it is proposed to create a new post of Membership Support Officer, whose role will be both to oversee and record attendance at meetings but also to facilitate and identify educational opportunities for members to acquire essential skills in order that they may fully participate in the running of the co-operative.
5. The expectation will be that most members will attend as a minimum four meetings per annum and that all members should strive to attend the Annual General Meeting.
6. It is proposed to use the suggested system of letters that was attached to the earlier draft participation policy for contacting and encouraging participation within the Co-op.

7. It is also recognised that there will be a financial cost of this policy, especially in terms of educational courses and the like. This will need to be borne in mind by the Treasurer when setting budgets in future.

The guiding principles:

Appendix4

1. Fairness and Equality
2. The co-operative principle of a tenant is a member and a member is a tenant.
3. To balance the needs of the co-operative with the needs of the member, taking in to consideration
 - a) We are talking about someone's home and
 - b) What the changes of circumstances are.
4. Flexibility where appropriate.

FAMILY HOUSES:

1. What happens if all the children leave the family home and one or two members are left in the family home:

- a) If they are a single parent and they occupy the whole unit and are sole person on the tenancy agreement then they have right to be able to remain in the house.
- b) If two members remain then if they are both on the tenancy agreement then both have right to stay. If one leaves then the tenancy would need to be changed to a single tenancy.
- c) The member(s) can be invited to join the internal transfer list if they want to down size.

2. What happens when a child reaches 18years old?

The co-op sends a letter inviting the child to become a member. If they want to, they can go through the allocation process to the prospective member stage and be in the pool. When they reach the pool, they have two options:

- a) To remain in the pool until a suitable vacancy arises
- b) Form a joint tenancy with the parent.

3. A partner who is not a member and is living with a member as part of the household.

We remind all our members of our current policy that:

'If you share your property with a non -member, this person is, legally, only a guest under your license agreement. Should you wish them to share and have a joint license with you, we will be happy to explain how you go about this. This is your choice, but please be aware that the non –member otherwise has no legal right to stay in the property.'

SHARED HOUSES:

1. What happens if one member leaves a shared house and the other member remains in the house and wishes to remain in the house alone?

- a) The remaining member is happy to stay and share

- b) The remaining member takes on the tenancy as a sole tenancy and the rent is set at an appropriate rate to cover the costs. The tenancy is not changed to a joint tenancy and when the remaining member leaves the house reverts to a shared house with two separate tenancies.
- c) As with the family houses, the member can be invited to join the internal transfer list so can down size if they want to.

When a member leaves the Co-op, we follow agreed policy.