

Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council Allocations Policy 2018



Doncaster
Council

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Section 1 - Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This is Doncaster Council's Housing Allocations Policy. The policy is operated on behalf of Doncaster Council by its Arm's Length Management Organisation, St Leger Homes of Doncaster.

1.1 Policy aims and objectives

As we do not own enough properties to meet the demand from everyone who has registered to move to one of our homes, we need to have a system in place which aims to give priority for housing to those who are in most housing need and reflects local priorities.

- This document sets out how we will assess applicants and let our properties and undertake our statutory duties to ensure that reasonable preference is given to applicants in housing need,
- Making use of our housing stock
- Supporting stable and vibrant communities by creating sustainable tenancies;
- Fulfilling our Obligations under Part VI and VII of the 1996 Housing Act and Homelessness Act 2002 as amended by the Homeless Reduction Act 2017.
- That we allocate properties according to our duties under the equalities legislation and in accordance with our tenancy strategy. Doncaster Council and St Leger Homes of Doncaster are committed to making sure that all people are treated fairly and allocations are effectively monitored

1.2 Legal Framework

The Housing Act 1996 part 6 ("the Act") requires the council to make all allocations of housing accommodation in accordance with a published scheme. This document is the full scheme, a summary of this scheme is available free of charge to anyone who asks for a copy, and can be found at www.doncasterhomechoice.co.uk.

The Act provides the framework for allocating housing accommodation, and defines categories of people who must be given reasonable preference when allocating accommodation. These categories, including locally agreed priorities are outlined in section 4.

The Act also requires the council to outline its position with regard to giving applicants choice on the housing offer or to allow households to make a statement of preference on the area in which they wish to live this is in section 1.4.

The provisions of the Localism Act 2011 allow the council the freedom to determine who qualifies for housing accommodation in its area, and develop solutions, which make best use of its social housing stock.

'Guidance for Local Authorities in England on the Allocation of Accommodation' was published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in June 2012. Local

authorities are required to have regard to this guidance when exercising their functions under Part 6 of the 1996 Act.

'Providing social housing for local people: statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England' was published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in December 2013. Local authorities are required to have regard to this guidance when exercising their functions under Part 6 of the 1996 Act.

The policy will have regard to subsequent legislative changes including on criteria or eligibility.

1.3 Related strategies

This policy has regard to:-

- Doncaster Council's Housing Strategy 2015 – 2025
- Doncaster Council's Tenancy Strategy 2018
- Doncaster Council's Place Plan 2016 – 2021
- Doncaster Council's Homeless Strategy

1.4 Statement of choice

We advertise available properties through a choice based lettings scheme known as 'Doncaster HomeChoice'. The scheme enables applicants to view each available property so that they can choose which properties to bid on from the properties they are eligible to move to. This system gives more transparency and choice to the allocation process as we will give feedback on how each property is let through the Recent Lets page on our website. This and other available information, will explain how your application will be assessed and your chances of being rehoused. More information is available on our website at www.doncasterhomechoice.co.uk.

Section 2 - Eligibility

2.0 Eligibility

All applications will be considered. The Act and associated legislation states that some applicants are not eligible for an allocation of social housing (except for certain existing social housing tenants including those seeking a transfer who are to be given reasonable preference). Those who are assessed as not being eligible will be notified in writing. We will give the reasons why and inform the applicant that they have the right to a review, as outlined in section 7.

2.1 Who is not eligible?

A person from abroad who is subject to immigration control within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 is ineligible for an allocation of housing accommodation unless they:

- Fall into one of the categories of people set out in regulations who are allowed to apply

- Or where the Secretary of State has prescribed a household as being ineligible for the allocation of social housing by local authorities in England

We will not allocate to two or more people jointly where one party is ineligible.

Where the applicant falls into one of the ineligible groups, but is a current council or housing association tenant and is requesting a transfer, they may be eligible if their assessed housing need is in a reasonable preference group as defined by the Housing Act 1996 Part VI.

As previously stated the eligibility of persons, including those from abroad is determined by the Secretary of State and is subject to change. We will have regard to any changes that occur after the publication of this policy.

Eligibility for an allocation may change over time therefore acceptance on to the register does not guarantee that the person will be allocated accommodation. Eligibility will be confirmed again at the point of consideration of making an offer of accommodation and on review of their application. Where a person's circumstances have changed and they are no longer eligible, their application will be removed from the housing register.

Section 3 - Qualification

In addition to being eligible, applicants need to then qualify to join the housing register. Those who are assessed as non-qualifying will be notified in writing. We will give the reasons why and inform the applicant that they have the right to a review, as outlined in section 7.

3.0 Who does not qualify?

- Applicants without a Local Connection
- Applicants under the age of 16 years
- Applicants who own or have a financial interest and/or have transferred ownership of a property but have continuing rights to live there with equity in their property of more than £120,000 will not be registered unless they have an assessed housing need which they are unable to resolve. This is to support access to affordable housing predominantly for older people to access appropriate sheltered housing and reduce demand on Adult Social Care
- Applicants or members of their household who have a history of significant antisocial behaviour which may include violence or threats of violence to staff or agents of Doncaster Council, St Leger Homes of Doncaster, Registered Providers, previous landlords or the police or if they had been a tenant would have been considered to be a breach of tenancy
- Applicants or members of their household with a history of significant unsatisfactory tenancy conduct
- Applicants or members of their household with housing related debt equivalent to 8 weeks rent arrears with the exception of applicants in the Platinum Resettlement Category who have been identified as ready to move into independent living and are engaging with the resettlement process

We reserve the right to consider applicants in exceptional circumstances who are defined as non-qualifying above, including current Doncaster Council tenants who have accrued housing related debt and have been recommended for rehousing to smaller accommodation by the SLHD Tenancy sustainability team.

3.1 Local Connection

Doncaster HomeChoice operates a scheme with a Local Connection Criteria. Applicants aged 16 or over are able to apply and they must provide evidence that they have a local connection to Doncaster for a minimum 3 years up to and including the date of their application.

A person has a local connection where;

- They have lived for the last 3 years in Doncaster through their own choice – this does not include residence in prisons, institutions or where they have been rehoused in temporary accommodation in the area by another authority
- They are currently employed in Doncaster and have been for the last 3 years
- They have direct family who live in Doncaster and have done so for the last 3 years. Direct family members are spouses, civil partners, parents, grandparents, sons, daughters, brothers or sisters
- They have other special circumstances that connect them to Doncaster

3.2 Applicants exempt from the Local Connection Criteria

- Members of the armed forces and former service personnel, where the application is made within 5 years of discharge
- Bereaved spouses and civil partners of member of the armed forces leaving service family accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner
- Serving or former members of the reserved forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as result of their service
- Existing social housing tenants who have a need to move to a particular locality in Doncaster where failure to meet that need would cause hardship; and have a need to move for work-related reasons, as set out in regulations under the Right to Move 2015
- Homeless applicants as defined in Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 where they have not been referred to another housing authority
- Applications may be considered via the National Witness Protection Scheme. This will be decided on a case by case basis by the Head of Access to Homes or Director of Housing Services of St Leger Homes of Doncaster
- DMBC Council Tenants who are assessed into a priority band of Platinum, Gold or Silver
- DMBC Council Tenants on the separate transfer list have to have lived in their current tenancy for a minimum of 12 months

3.3 What checks are made on applicants and what documents are needed?

An application will remain inactive until we receive all the information we require to complete a full assessment. This means that we cannot allocate a property to the applicant during this period. The onus is on the applicant to provide information to confirm their identity,

residence and circumstances within 28 days of their original application or change in circumstances.

As a minimum requirement, all applicants must provide the following;

- Two forms of identification, one of which shows their current address, and one which confirms their National Insurance number; and photographic ID where available
- Confirmation of Local Connection
- Proof of Child Benefit/Child Tax Credit for dependent children
- Proof of residence of other household members
- Any evidence or information to support a priority
- Validation of information supplied from the Border and Immigration Agency.
- Landlord References from a current and/or previous landlord where you have been resident at your current address for less than 12 months
- A satisfactory home visit and rental statement and confirmation of no known anti-social behaviour from partner agencies may be accepted in the absence of a landlord reference

Where the applicant is in the Resettlement Category and is ready to move into independent living more flexibility will be applied

3.4 Financial resources

Applicants must give details of their financial resources on the housing application form. This includes any interest in or ownership of property or land and we use this to determine if they qualify to be accepted onto the Housing Register. We also use this information to decide what, if any, priority we will award.

Where applicants choose not to disclose this information we reserve the right to not register a housing application.

3.5 Tenancy Sustainability

A key part of the process involves a Tenancy Sustainability Assessment. This will identify those applicants who may be at risk of failing to maintain a tenancy.

The assessment will provide an opportunity to identify the best housing solution for the applicant and the support that may be necessary to ensure the best chance of a sustained tenancy.

Before we offer a tenancy, we will assess whether an applicant has any housing support needs that could affect their ability to manage a tenancy successfully. This could include referring an applicant to supported accommodation before we offer a tenancy.

We assess Housing applications from ex-offenders through a multi-agency risk assessment process. St Leger Homes is a member of the Safer Doncaster Partnership and we work with South Yorkshire Police, Probation Service and other partners to complete this process. This ensures that any offers of housing we make are in accordance with the risk assessment framework.

3.6 Harassment and Violence

Where an applicant has said they need to move, because they are suffering violence, threats of violence or harassment they will be assessed by Housing Assessment Panel. The panel will consider the evidence provided and a decision will be made to whether additional preference should be given.

We will consider other measures e.g. close circuit television, injunctions, mediation or sanctuary schemes but our primary concern is for the ongoing safety and wellbeing of the victim.

3.7 What happens if false information is provided or where relevant information is withheld?

It is essential to supply the correct information as any applicant seeking to obtain accommodation or enhance their priority by making a false statement, by withholding relevant information, or by failing to tell the Doncaster HomeChoice about any changes in circumstances, may have their application cancelled.

3.8 Deliberate worsening of circumstances

Where we have reason to believe that an applicant has deliberately worsened their circumstances to get housing priority we will suspend their application and investigate. If our investigation cannot show deliberate intent, we will reinstate their priority from their original effective date.

Any applicant who has deliberately worsened their circumstances will not be awarded additional priority. However, we also reserve the right to cancel their application.

If the applicant has been allocated a property in these circumstances then we may take court action to evict them, under Ground 5 in Schedule 2 Housing Act 1985 (as amended by section 146 of 1996 Housing Act).

3.9 Suspensions

Some circumstances may result in your application being suspended for up to 12 months. Following a 12 month period the application will be reassessed. The circumstances this includes can be:

- Certain criminal convictions
- Customers in the bronze and general band who have bid and then refused three offers will have their application suspended for six months. This includes refusals of adapted accommodation which would have been suitable.
- Prisoners who do not have a release date
- If we find out that you have become ineligible or non-qualifying to remain on the register, we will suspend you while we carry out our investigations.
- Where we decide that an applicant requires tenancy support to be put in place before we offer a tenancy
- Where an applicant is in the Resettlement Pathway and is not ready to move into independent living
- Where an applicant is in the Homeless Prevention category where they do not have

access to housing costs and homelessness can be prevented.

- Where an applicant has not updated their housing application at the request of Doncaster HomeChoice within the timescales given. Applications will be reinstated from the original application date if contact is made within a 3 month period of being suspended and rehousing is still required.

Section 4 - How the banding scheme works

4.0 How the banding scheme works

This section explains the banding scheme we use to decide the priority we give to an applicant. There are five bands within the scheme, three priority bands, Platinum, Gold and Silver and two non-priority bands, Bronze and General.

We have a Transfer List outside of the scheme for non-priority transfers.

The banding scheme takes into account reasonable preference categories as set out in section 166A (3) of the Housing Act 1996 as amended.

All Doncaster Council tenants who are accepted onto the register will be given advice and support to access the Mutual Exchange register.

The band in which an applicant is placed, is based on the information supplied on the application form, and relevant supporting information confirming current circumstances.

4.1 Platinum Band

Platinum Band

Full Duty Homeless applicants in accordance with part VII of the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002 as amended by the Homeless Reduction Act 2017

Households who are in priority need who have a local connection and have not made themselves intentionally homeless. It includes applicants who do not have a local connection but who would not be safe if they were made to return to an area where they have a local connection. We will award Platinum band from the decision date if alternative suitable private rented accommodation is not available.

Where an applicant has been in this priority band for a period of one month and has not placed a bid on reasonable or suitable accommodation an offer of suitable accommodation will be made to discharge the full housing duty.

A resettlement status to support those engaging in the resettlement pathway in supported housing ready to move into independent living.

Applicants engaging in a resettlement pathway in supported housing who have been assessed by the Support Provider in conjunction with the client as no longer requiring the level of support provided by the service and;

- Where the move to independent accommodation has been identified as appropriate and
- An appropriate package of resettlement/longer term support is ready to be put in place

Applicants in this category will be moving out as a planned move and be actively engaging with the resettlement process.

Their priority will be backdated to reflect their time in the pathway where an earlier application was made.

Applicants whose property is in the Doncaster Borough and has been approved for demolition or clearance by the Council. We will move applicants to the platinum band at a date provided by Doncaster Council's nominated officer.

Lodgers, who are able to prove 12 month's residency prior to the clearance order being made, can submit a separate application.

Owner Occupiers in the approved demolition or clearance area will be moved into the Platinum Band once they have formally agreed to sell their property to Doncaster Council where this is necessary to progress the regeneration scheme.

Private tenants in the approved demolition or clearance area will be moved into the Platinum Band once their landlord has formally agreed to sell their property to Doncaster Council.

Applicants will be placed in this band where major works are required to their property and a vulnerable group is in residence as defined in Housing Health and Safety Rating System making it uninhabitable and after an assessment has been carried out as to whether they can resolve their own housing need. Applicants will be placed in this band from a date directed by the Council's Housing enforcement team or the Executive Management Team of St Leger Homes of Doncaster. Applicants who obstruct any repairs will have this priority removed.

Applicants unable to return home from hospital, as their current property does not meet their medical needs or where temporary accommodation would be inappropriate or they require immediate re housing preventing an admission to hospital or institution.

This category includes people who have been in hospital or other institutional care setting where their current home is no longer suitable to return to, even as a temporary measure. Confirmation of the situation must be provided stating that the applicant is ready for discharge and their current property is unsuitable giving the reasons why. Applicants who did not have a home they could reasonably occupy before they went into hospital will be subject to a homelessness assessment. We will award platinum priority from the date we are notified of discharge arrangements. In the event that the Council decides the current home is suitable to adapt or have additional support and this is the preferred solution, the application will not be placed in the platinum band.

Armed Forces and former armed forces personnel in urgent housing need within 5 years of discharge.

This will include those;

- Leaving armed forces with no suitable accommodation and in urgent housing need
- Those injured or disabled needing urgent rehousing
- Bereaved spouses or civil partners who will no longer be entitled to reside in accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence and do not have alternative suitable accommodation

Platinum priority will be given following confirmation of discharge and verification of housing circumstances, including financial resources. .

Foster carers in Doncaster who do not have suitable accommodation to foster and are not able to resolve their own circumstances.

Confirmation is required from the relevant foster caring service stating that the applicant is an agreed foster carer where their current accommodation is unsuitable and they are unable to resolve their own circumstances. Priority will be awarded from the date that they are agreed as a foster carer.

Tenants vacating adapted accommodation where the adaptations are no longer required by a member of the household.

This priority will be awarded where the Council is requesting an urgent move due to the extensive nature of the adaptations with an identified applicant in need.

4.2 Gold Band

Gold Band

Applicants whose current home is overcrowded by two or more bedrooms.

We will use the following criteria to assess overcrowding.

A separate bedroom to each:

- Married or cohabiting couple
- Person who is not a child (age 16 or over)
- Pair of adolescents aged 10-16 years of the same sex
- Pair of children aged under 10 years of age regardless of sex.

In the case of a property with 2 reception rooms, one room will be counted as a bedroom provided it could be reasonably used as such. If the overcrowding occurs for reasons other than natural overcrowding proof will be required that there was no other option and that the situation has existed for a 6 month period. Proof of permanent residence will be required. We will not rehouse an applicant into accommodation that results in them being statutory overcrowded.

Applicants occupying a property that has been assessed as a category one hazard under the Health and Safety Rating System with a vulnerable group in residence, excluding crowding and space standards.

Applicants living in private accommodation assessed to be prejudicial to health as defined by the Environmental Protection Act or Category One under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System Regulations, where it is agreed by the Council's Housing enforcement team and the Doncaster HomeChoice Manager that the most appropriate course of action is to re-house the household. Where the applicant is the owner occupier of the property they are only eligible if they are not able to resolve their circumstances (this includes raising funds through a loan or mortgage). In all cases, where access to undertake works is unreasonably restricted this may result in priority being removed.

Applicants in critical need for re-housing due to medical or welfare reasons.

Medical priority will be given to people who are chronically sick or severely disabled where their current home is substantially unsuitable for their needs.

In the case of physical disability, a suitably qualified Doncaster Council Officer will assess whether adaptation work to an applicant's home is appropriate. Priority will only be given if

re-housing is assessed to be more appropriate than undertaking adaptation work to the applicants existing home and where applicants do not have the ability to resolve their own circumstances.

Welfare grounds covers applicants who need to move for urgent social or welfare reasons where there is an immediate need to move.

This would include special guardians, holders of a residence order and family and friends who are not foster carers but who have taken on the care of a child because the parents are unable to provide care and has been approved by Children Services.

This category also includes those who could not be expected to find their own accommodation, such as young adults with learning disabilities who wish to live independently in the community with appropriate support.

Applicants that need to move to a particular location as not to do so would suffer hardship to themselves or others.

This includes those who will give or receive support to access specialist medical treatment or give or receive care. In these cases an established ongoing medical need must be demonstrated such as mental illness or disorder, physical or learning disability, or progressive medical condition. We also take into account access to transport and distance which impacts on the ability to give or receive support or care in a significant way.

This also includes Doncaster Council Tenants who are affected by Welfare Reform and under-occupying their current tenancy by 2 or more bedrooms and where rehousing to smaller alternative accommodation is recommended by SLHD Tenancy sustainment team following assessment of their circumstances.

Applicants in service tenancies.

Applicant in service or tied tenancies will need to contact the Doncaster HomeChoice team as soon as it is known they must leave their accommodation and evidence of this will need to be provided.

If an applicant is in accommodation tied to their employment with Doncaster Council and they are retiring (or the service is subject to change), consideration will be given by Doncaster Council to them being given the opportunity to remain in their current accommodation where a service tenancy is no longer required. Any application will be reviewed on a case by case basis by the Council's nominated officer in conjunction with the Director of Housing Services at St Leger Homes and will include reference to the continuing needs of the service and type of accommodation occupied and other criteria outlined in this Allocations Policy.

Leaving Care.

Any young person under the age of 25 that the Council has assessed and owes a duty to house under the Children Act.

Applicants who have been assessed by Doncaster Council's Housing Options Service as at risk of homelessness who have a local connection who are not statutory homeless and have a priority need under the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002 as amended by the Homeless Reduction Act 2017.

Violence or Harassment

All applicants who require rehousing as a result of violence, threats of violence or harassment will be assessed by a multi-agency assessment panel who will consider the evidence provided as to the severity and therefore the urgency of the rehousing need and

whether additional preference should be given.

Other measures will also be considered e.g. close circuit television, injunctions, Mediation or Sanctuary Schemes but the primary consideration is for the ongoing safety and wellbeing of the victim.

4.3 Silver Band

Silver Band

Doncaster Council tenants who are under occupying their current home and request to move to smaller accommodation.

This includes Doncaster Council Tenants who are affected by Welfare Reform and under-occupying their current tenancy by 1 bedroom and where rehousing to smaller alternative accommodation is recommended by SLHD Tenancy sustainability team following assessment of their circumstances.

Silver band priority will be awarded where the tenant has stated they wish to move to smaller accommodation where they are under-occupying their current home. Where applicants have housing related debt due to under-occupation they will be subject to an assessment by SLHD Tenancy sustainability team who will request priority dependant on the outcome of their assessment.

Applicants whose current home is overcrowded by 1 bedroom.

We will use the following criteria to assess overcrowding.

A separate bedroom to each:

- Married or cohabiting couple
- Person who is not a child (age 16 or over)
- Pair of adolescents aged 10-16 years of the same sex
- Pair of children aged under 10 years regardless of sex.

In the case of a property with 2 reception rooms, one room will be counted as a bedroom provided it could be reasonably used as such. If the overcrowding occurs for reasons other than natural overcrowding, proof will be required that there was no other option and that the situation has existed for a 6 month period. Proof of permanent residence will be required. We will not rehouse an applicant into accommodation that results in them being statutory overcrowded.

Applicants who have been assessed by Doncaster Council's Housing Options Service as homeless without having a priority need under the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002 as amended by the Homeless Reduction Act 2017.

Applicants who have been assessed by Doncaster Council's Housing Options Service as intentionally homeless and having a priority need in accordance with the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002 as amended by the Homeless Reduction Act 2017.

Applicants taking up a particular employment, education or training opportunity.

All applicants will be assessed by Doncaster HomeChoice and Silver priority will be

awarded based on individual need where applicant needs to move to a particular locality and hardship would be caused if they didn't move.

Applicants in substantial need for rehousing due to medical/health or welfare reasons.

Medical priority will be given to people with an identified ongoing level of illness or disability. Within this category are applicants able to use the facilities within their current home, but is not wholly suitable for their needs due to physical or mental ill health. Their need will be assessed by a Medical Officer or Occupational Therapist.

This category also includes applicants who need to move for moderate social or welfare reasons including to give or receive care.

Tenants vacating adapted properties where the adaptations are no longer needed by a member of the household

4.4 Bronze Band

Bronze Band

Those applicants whose priority band has been removed after they have refused 3 reasonable offers will be placed in the bronze band. This is with the exception of Platinum band Full Duty Homeless applicants who are eligible for one offer only before their priority is removed.

Applicants who have not been assessed as having a priority but still wish to move will be placed in the bronze band with the exception of applicants indicated below.

4.5 Transfer List

Transfer List

Applicants who are Doncaster Council Tenants, who have lived in their property for over 12 months and are not eligible to be included in any category of the Housing Register will be placed onto the transfer list after a satisfactory inspection of their home and confirmation of satisfactory tenancy conduct. If an applicant is then assessed in to a Reasonable Preference Group detailed above, they will then be placed into the relevant priority band on the Housing Register.

Applicants on the transfer list will be held in date order of application.

4.6 General Band

General Band

Applicants who own or have a financial interest in a property and have equity of less than £120,000.

It is important that we give housing priority to those who need it the most. For this reason, where applicants have no identified housing need or are able to resolve their own situation will be registered in the General Band. We will consider someone as having sufficient finances to obtain housing for themselves where:

- They have assets and income of £120,000 and above

Where the applicant has specific requirements which they are unable to resolve applications will be considered within this threshold confirmation of their individual circumstances will be considered against the criteria of the Housing allocations policy. We will also take into account disposal of savings, assets or capital when calculating the resources of the applicant which will include the disposal of a property either below the market value or at nil value and any ongoing right of occupation.

4.7 Effective and Registration dates

Applicants in the priority bands of Platinum, Gold and Silver will be placed in effective date order which is the date the priority was awarded. This means that all priority applicants are fairly awarded priority based on their change in circumstances and not their original registration date. If two applicants moved into a priority band on the same date then the applicant with the earlier registration date will take priority.

Bronze and General band applicants and Transfer list applicants will be held in order of registration date.

- If you are a serving or former armed forces personnel, we will backdate your registration date to reflect your length of service on receipt of your service record.
- If you are in the Platinum Resettlement priority we will backdate your effective date to the date of original application to reflect the length of time you have been in the resettlement pathway.
- If your application has previously been suspended under a Homeless Prevention category and you are now able to access housing costs through a planned move we will backdate your application date to the date of your original application. We will assess your circumstances and backdate any relevant priority effective date to reflect your original application date.
- Where an applicant has not updated their housing application at the request of Doncaster HomeChoice within the requested timescales and their application was suspended. Applications will be reinstated from the original application date if contact is made within a 3 month period of being suspended and rehousing is still required.

4.8 Removal of priority

Applicants who are assessed in the Platinum band who have been assessed as Full Duty Homeless in accordance with part VII of the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002 as amended by the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 and have not placed a bid on suitable and reasonable accommodation after one month may have their duty discharged by a suitable offer of accommodation.

Applicants who are in the Platinum, Gold or Silver priority bands and refuse three reasonable offers, will have their priority removed and will be placed in the Bronze band. The exception to this is applicants who are in Platinum band due to being assessed as Full Duty Homeless, as they would receive one offer of suitable accommodation only, in order to discharge the Council's housing duty under Part VII Housing Act 1996.

Applicants who are assessed in to the Bronze and General band who refuse three suitable offers of accommodation will have their application suspended for six months.

Where a demolition scheme is being held up because applicants are still in their properties, despite all reasonable attempts to help them find suitable accommodation, one final offer of accommodation will be made. If the applicant refuses the property their priority may be cancelled and legal action may be taken to repossess the property.

If applicants are not actively bidding on properties where it would have been reasonable for them to do so, their application will be reviewed and they may lose their priority status.

It will be the applicant's responsibility to bid for available properties but support will be given where needed and actively identified.

Section 5 - Restrictions on the allocation of properties

5.0 Restrictions on the allocation of properties

This section sets out the requirements which applicants may be expected to fulfil before they are allocated a tenancy including the restrictions we place on the allocation of properties.

What are the situations where an allocation may be denied or have a restriction placed on it?

Applicants under 18

Applicants under the age of 18 must fulfil one of the criteria outlined below to be eligible to be considered for a tenancy;

- Have a support mechanism in place or a key worker is available (each case will be assessed individually); or
- Have been accepted as homeless and in priority need under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996; or
- Be a recognised care leaver.

We will work in partnership with Doncaster Children's Trust and the 16/17 year old Protocol.

In these circumstances applicants will be allocated a License Agreement/Equitable tenancy.

We will establish if an applicant has a guarantor. We may not proceed with an allocation if a satisfactory guarantor cannot be provided.

Rent arrears and other housing debt

Normally applicants with rent arrears or other housing related debt equivalent to eight weeks rent arrears will not qualify to join the housing register until their arrears have been reduced. This includes current or former tenant arrears, although current Doncaster Council tenants affected by under-occupation restrictions to housing benefit under Welfare Reform will be assessed separately by SLHD Tenancy sustainability team and may be referred for rehousing under the scheme.

Housing related debt that is barred under the Limitations Act 1980 will not be taken into account.

If a customer is registered with housing related debt, it is expected that they will clear the arrears in full before any offer of accommodation is made if they are in a non-priority band.

Every case is considered on its merits and where there are extenuating circumstances, we may offer applicants a tenancy.

This mainly applies to applicants in Platinum, Gold and Silver bands and we would require an agreed repayment plan to be in place with regular payments being maintained before we would make an offer.

Prisoners

Prisoners' housing applications will be activated when they have their release date. Until then, their applications will not be activated. However an offer of accommodation will not be made until the prisoner is released.

Sensitive Let

Where a sensitive let is required due to the location of a property or other circumstances, we may adjust the property eligibility rules, banding order or allocate the property by Direct Match. This is in exceptional cases only.

5.1 What size and type of property will applicants be considered for?

Details of applicants' property eligibility can be found in appendix A. Where a property does not meet the identified housing needs of an applicant any offer may be withdrawn. This may be reviewed separately to the Housing Allocations Policy by a nominated Officer in SLHD and Doncaster Council.

5.2 Restrictions on flats and bungalows

There are certain circumstances where we restrict access to the property type based on factors such as age, disabilities, pets, household size etc. Where there are restrictions, the property advert will explain them so that applicants are aware.

The main restrictions are for ground floor flats, sheltered housing, bungalows or adapted properties. For these we usually restrict access to people over 60 or those who have been assessed by an Occupational Therapist as requiring a certain type of adapted accommodation or facility. Where a property is age designated we will consider applicants over 60 first and remaining applicants in reverse age order, starting with the oldest applicant. General band applicants will be considered after applicants in all other bands as above. If the property is adapted, priority will be offered to applicants with an assessed need for adaptations first. This means that we may bypass a higher priority applicant if they do not have this need.

We may also apply restrictions on an individual basis. Where there is purpose built or extensively adapted accommodation a direct nomination will be requested from Doncaster Council's Accessible Housing Register to ensure best use of housing stock.

5.3 What size home can an applicant apply for?

When looking at bedroom requirements, we have taken into account the shortage of family housing in Doncaster and our need to make the best use of our housing stock.

As a result, we assess the number of bedrooms a household requires by counting the number of people to be housed, their ages and gender of children.

The exception to this is where an applicant is requesting rehousing due to demolition/clearance. Here, the applicant can request another property with the same number of bedrooms as (or fewer bedrooms than) their current home, even if the household does not now meet the minimum household size rules.

A woman who is pregnant with appropriate medical confirmation will be assessed as a household with a child. If she already has a child, the unborn baby will be treated as if it were the same gender.

We take into account households that have; carers, shared access, equal or staying access to decide the number of bedrooms required.

We will also take account of the needs for more bedrooms for families approved to adopt or foster children.

Applicants may be considered for a bedroom in excess of their current assessed needs if they have staying access where a parent has the child up to the age of 17, to stay at least two nights in every week. We will require proof of access.

If an extra bedroom is needed to give or receive care, we will require supporting evidence. We make a distinction between someone requiring frequent care and overnight care.

We will not make an offer of a property if it will result in statutory overcrowding.

5.4 Local Lettings policies

In the interest of creating and maintaining sustainable communities where people want to live, we may introduce local lettings policies.

Local lettings policies will usually be proposed by St Leger Homes but must be agreed by Doncaster Council and have agreed review dates.

As local lettings policies are subject to frequent review and change they are not listed in this document. A copy of any current policies in place can be found on the Doncaster HomeChoice website: www.doncasterhomechoice.co.uk

When we advertise properties within a local lettings scheme, we will make this clear in the advert.

Section 6 - Advertising and Letting Properties

6.0 Advertising and Letting Properties

This section explains how Doncaster HomeChoice will advertise available properties; sort the bids once the bidding cycle has closed and then offer properties to the successful applicant.

Properties will be advertised in accordance with the publicised cycle.

6.1 Bidding for properties

Bids can be made by telephone, via the internet or in person at reception points.

We operate an assisted bidding list for applicants who require additional support.

Bids can be withdrawn by the applicant at any time within the cycle and reused on alternative properties.

When the bidding cycle is closed we will look at the generated list of applicants who have expressed an interest in a property. Following verification checks, we will offer the in the following way:

- Meeting the lettings criteria as stated in the property advert;
- Band;
- Effective date;
- Registration date.

This is with the exception of purpose built or extensively adapted accommodation where we will request nominations from Doncaster Councils Accessible Housing Register.

6.2 Low demand

We have a range of options available to enable successful allocation of accommodation. Where we know we have less demand for a property we will use one of the following options:

- Open Market
- Fast Track

Open Market

Applicants who do not meet the qualification requirements as detailed in Section 3.0 but can demonstrate that they can maintain a tenancy may be considered for the open market. These properties will be clearly marked during the advertising cycle.

Fast Track

In certain circumstances we may vary the property eligibility rules and invite applicants to place a bid on properties that they would normally not be able to bid on. These properties will be clearly advertised and may be advertised outside of the normal bidding cycle.

6.3 How do applicants find out if they have been allocated the property?

We will contact the successful applicant who will have to decide whether to accept the offer before they will be considered for further offers. If an applicant appears at the top of more than one shortlist in the same lettings cycle, they will be contacted and asked which property they prefer, unless they are currently under offer for a property advertised in a previous lettings cycle. Any offer is subject to confirmation that the applicant is still eligible and qualifying at the time of the offer.

Offers are made subject to a satisfactory verification process confirming the circumstances, eligibility and qualification of the applicant. Applicants will only be made one offer at a time. Once they are made an offer an applicant will not be considered for other offers of accommodation until the current offer is refused.

Applicants who are unsuccessful will not be contacted. However, feedback on homes that have been let will be published weekly at www.doncasterhomechoice.co.uk giving the successful applicant's band, effective date and registration date. This information and information on turnover of accommodation across the borough will help applicants understand their chances of being rehoused.

6.4 How long will applicants be given to decide whether to accept the offer of a property?

Applicants will normally be given 24 hours to make a decision on an offer after an accompanied viewing of the property.

6.5 Will all properties be advertised to bid on?

All properties will be advertised to bid on with the exception of properties required with the following criteria.

- **Purpose built properties or those with extensive adaptations** which meet the specific needs of identified applicants with mobility or other medical conditions where a direct let will ensure best use of stock, due to the lack of this type of accommodation
- **Housing Management purposes such as decanting during major refurbishment**, use as temporary accommodation, allocation to an applicant in the transfer band as a direct let or situations where the rehousing of a household must be a managed process and it is inappropriate to advertise and also cases identified through the No Homeless Process.

- **The Housing Assessment Panel** will assess and decide on Housing Management Lets. This may include applicants who are left in occupation of a Doncaster Council home. In exceptional cases where strict confidentiality is required a decision will be made by the Director of Housing Services at St Leger Homes and in their absence the Head of Service for Access to Homes.
- **Extra Care Housing Schemes** - Access to Extra Care housing will be assessed separately by a panel as these schemes need a balance of tenants with varying levels of personal care and support needs. This is outside of this process.
- **Regeneration Schemes** - Where a demolition area has been agreed by a Doncaster Council cabinet decision to allow for regeneration, it may be necessary to ring-fence properties in adjacent areas for applicants whose homes are to be demolished. In this instance, the decision to ring-fence will be made by a panel chaired by the Council's nominated officer. The following factors will be taken into account when making a decision to ring-fence properties:
 - Timescale of demolition;
 - Availability of suitable properties in the area;
 - Impact of other priorities.

Where there are complex or multiple needs that can only be met within a reasonable time within that area, a decision may be taken by the panel to lift the ring-fencing for such cases.

Feedback on these allocations will be advertised as a Direct Match.

6.6 What is a housing assessment panel?

There may be times when certain circumstances are not covered fully by the allocations policy or may need further assessment. These cases will be referred to the housing assessment panel. We will look at each case individually and assess it on its own merits. We will involve the appropriate agencies before we reach a decision, including multi agency meetings where appropriate.

6.7 What properties are given to the different bands?

Generally, properties will be advertised with a priority order of Platinum, Gold, Silver, Bronze, Transfer List and then General band. General band applicants will be considered after applicants in all other bands and applicants on the Transfer List. This is to meet applicants in identified housing need and give lower priority to applicants who have the resources available to meet their own housing need.

Certain properties will also be advertised giving applicants in the Open Market an opportunity to place a bid, these applicants will be considered after all other bands.

This priority order may be varied under the terms of individual local lettings policies, sensitive lets or fast track properties.

Applicants on the Transfer List who have been made three reasonable offers of accommodation may have their application suspended for a period of six months.

6.8 Adapted Properties

Adapted properties, with the exception of purpose build or extensively adapted properties will be advertised for applicants to bid on and priority will be given to applicants assessed as having an identified need for adapted accommodation. This will include younger people with assessed medical needs for adapted accommodation who will be eligible to bid on age restricted adapted accommodation, although any offer will be subject to a satisfactory risk assessment and Occupational Therapist assessment.

Eligible applicants will be assessed by an Occupational Therapist and their requirements determined by Doncaster Councils Accessible Housing Register (AHR).

In general, the tenancy of any adapted property will be in the sole name of the applicant with a disability.

6.9 Exhausted or nil shortlist

Where a property is advertised and not let, due to refusals or no bids, we reserve the right to vary property eligibility. On this rare occasion we may relax the eligibility criteria or age restrictions, to make best use of stock.

6.10 Type of tenancy that will be offered

The type of tenancy that will be offered will be granted in accordance with DMBC's Tenancy Strategy.

6.11 Withdrawing Offers or properties from advert

In exceptional circumstances it may be necessary to withdraw an offer for example where there is a change in the applicant's circumstances which affects their application or where false information has been given or relevant information has been withheld. All instances of offers being withdrawn will be discussed with the applicant. This includes where a property is no longer available to let or required for an emergency situation.

6.12 Offers to Employees/Elected Members/Board Members

In order that we are treating all applicants fairly, any applications from employees of Doncaster Council or St. Leger Homes of Doncaster, Elected Members or St Leger Homes of Doncaster Board Members and their relatives, must be disclosed on the application form. These applications will be processed in the normal way, but in order to demonstrate our allocation is both fair and transparent; offers will not be released without the approval of a Head of Service within St. Leger Homes of Doncaster or an appropriate designated officer.

6.13 Joint Tenancies

New tenants are required to take up joint tenancies where appropriate. This includes;

- Married couples
- Applicants living together as a couple
- Two or more people have originally joined the housing register together, if both or all applicants are moving into the property they should be granted a joint tenancy

except in the case of

- Age designated accommodation where one party is not eligible; spouses and registered civil partners will be considered
- A person on the register wants a joint tenancy with someone who has also made an application.

6.14 Refusing an Offer

Applicants in all bands, with the exception of Full duty homeless applicants in the Platinum Band who are entitled to one reasonable offer only to discharge a housing duty, are eligible to three reasonable offers of accommodation before their application is reviewed. This includes offers of suitable adapted accommodation.

Applicants within the priority bands of Platinum, Gold or Silver who refuse three offers of suitable accommodation may have their priority removed and their application moved to the Bronze Band. Applicants within the non-priority bands of Bronze, or General Bands who refuse three suitable offers of accommodation may be suspended from the housing register for six months and be unable to bid for accommodation during this period.

Applicants on the Transfer List who refuse three reasonable offers of accommodation may also be suspended from the transfer register for six months.

Each case will be assessed individually as to the reason for their refusal before a decision is made to reduce priority or suspend an application. Applicants will be informed in writing and will be given the right to a review as in section 7.

Section 7 - Right of Review

7.0 Right of review

This section details how applicants can request a review of certain decisions made by Doncaster HomeChoice.

Every application is made in accordance with the requirements set out in this policy document and any review will be considered by the Doncaster HomeChoice team for the following reasons and timescales.

7.1 Reasons for review

Applicants are entitled to a review in the following circumstances;

- If it is decided that they are ineligible to join the register. In this case, the applicant will be notified of the decision and the reason for it
- If it is decided that they do not qualify to join the register. In this case, the applicants will be notified of the decision and the reason for it
- Where applicants feel they have been unfairly treated in the allocation process
- Where applicants disagree with their registration or effective date

- Where applicants disagree with a removal of their priority
- Where applicants have been removed from the register other than at their request

7.2 The review process

In all review cases an applicant must make a request within 28 days of the date of the letter informing them of the decision.

A request for review should be made in writing however we will consider verbal requests in certain circumstances.

We aim to deal with an applicant's review within 28 days of receiving all documentation in support of the review. If we are unable to do so, we will acknowledge the review within that time advising applicants when they may expect a reply.

Where an applicant asks for a review of the decision, they will receive details inviting them to submit any further written representations or new information with a bearing on the review and a deadline date will be given.

Applicants are not required to provide reasons for challenging the decision however; this may help their case, as there may be new information, which was not available at the time.

The officer involved in the original decision will not be involved in the review process.

Homelessness reviews will be carried out under a separate process under provisions in Part VII of the Housing Act 1996.

If applicants are still not satisfied with the decision, a complaint can be made in accordance with St Leger Homes Complaints procedure.

Section 8 - Other Housing Options

This section details other options open to applicants on the Doncaster Councils Housing Register.

8.0 Mutual Exchanges

Secure council and tenants of other Registered Providers, in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, who occupy permanent self-contained accommodation, have a legal right to exchange their tenancies under section 92 of the Housing Act 1985.

A Mutual Exchange is where a tenant can find their own exchange through adverts on the Doncaster HomeChoice website: www.doncasterhomechoice.co.uk, however before an exchange can take place both exchange partners must get their landlords' permission.

All Doncaster Council tenants who are accepted onto the register will be given advice and support to access the Mutual Exchange register.

8.1 Nominations to Housing Associations (Registered Providers)

Doncaster Council works in partnership with other Registered Providers and advertises a proportion of their properties through Doncaster HomeChoice. Applicants can bid on these properties and be considered subject to meeting the matching criteria stated in the advert.

8.2 Other Affordable Housing Options

Due to the limited amount of social housing available it is important that we promote affordable housing options to raise awareness of the range of schemes available and ensure applicants are aware of the range of available housing options.

These options include but are not limited to the following:

- Shared Equity Schemes

If an applicant would like to buy a home of their own but can't afford to, they may wish to consider shared equity in a property. An applicant can buy an initial share of between 25% and 75% of the property and pay a rent on the remaining share that they do not own. Further shares can be bought at a later stage and this can lead to them owning their own home outright.

- Help To Buy

This is a Government backed scheme that helps people who want to buy a new build home.

Further information on current affordable housing options can be found on the Doncaster HomeChoice website or by contacting the Doncaster HomeChoice team direct.

8.3 Private Rented accommodation

Our Home Options Service give advice about options and access to the Private Rented Sector.

St Leger Homes of Doncaster manage and let certain private rented properties which are maintained to a certain standard and will be advertised to let. These properties will be let on a first come first serve basis through St Leger Lettings.

More information on alternative housing options can be found at:
www.doncasterhomechoice.co.uk

Section 9 - Sharing information and Confidentiality

9.0 Sharing of information and confidentiality

We will treat all information provided as confidential.

All details held and information processed are subject to the controls of the Data Protection Legislation and European Convention of Human Rights Act, however; we may release and /or request information without consent where necessary under the clauses or exemptions of the Data Protection Legislation and other statute and legal obligations.