

DRAFT

Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council

Housing Allocations Policy

November 2022



Doncaster
Council

| Policy Changes | Description | Section |
|-----------------------|---|------------------|
| Change 1 | Incentives for under-occupiers | 5.1 |
| Change 2 | Allocating properties to lower bands | 7.7 |
| Change 3 | Prioritising larger families for larger properties | 6.4 |
| Change 4 | Tenancy ready process | 4.6 |
| Change 5 | Homeless applicants priority | 5.1 |
| Change 6 | Resettlement pathway priority | 5.1 & 5.7 |
| Change 7 | Domestic abuse act | 4.3 & 5.2 |
| Change 8 | Age-designated properties | 6.3 |
| Change 9 | Separated/divorced partners of armed forces personnel | 4.3 & 5.1 |
| Change 10 | Number of offers and suspensions | 4.10, 5.8 & 7.14 |
| Change 11 | AHR policy refusal penalty | 4.10, 5.8 & 7.14 |
| Change 12 | Low demand properties | 7.2 |
| Change 13 | Right to not offer a property | 4.11 |
| Change 14 | Right to suspend the housing register and allocations | 2.5 |

Green = Policy Changes

Red = Additional Amendments

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1 Glossary of Terms

16/17 Year Old Protocol

The purpose of the protocol is to ensure that partners continue to work together to provide a constant and coordinated response to 16/17 year old young people who present as homeless and in need of accommodation and accommodation support services.

Adapted Properties

Adapted properties are homes designed or significantly adapted to meet the needs of people with physical or sensory disabilities, for example major changes to bathing facilities and / or access into or within a property.

Adopters and Fosterers

Adopters or prospective adopters approved by the local authority who are accommodating, or are likely to accommodate, a looked after child or a child who was previously looked after by a local authority. Foster carers must be approved by the local authority or prospective foster carers where initial assessment of their suitability is positive, and who are accommodating, or are likely to accommodate a looked after child or a child who was previously looked after by a local authority. It also includes extended family who are approved as foster carers for their relative under the Fostering Regulations, 2011 or where a residence order is granted by court under (1989 Children Act) and supported by Children's Social Care or Special Guardianship cases (2002 Adoption and Children Act) and supported by Children's Social Care. It does not include private foster carers or non-agency adoption arrangements.

Allocation Policy

A set of rules on how properties will be advertised and let providing consistency across council housing allocations and nominations to Housing Associations/Registered Providers.

Anti-social Behaviour

Behaviour or conduct causing or likely to cause nuisance, annoyance, harassment, alarm or distress to another person.

Applicant

A person who applies to register on the choice based lettings scheme, including tenants of a local authority or a Housing Association/Registered Provider.

Assisted Bidding

Where an appropriate person, with the consent of the applicant, submits bids on their behalf.

Bands

The system for setting out the different priorities of housing need.

Bidding

The way in which registered applicants express an interest in an advertised vacancy. In this context bidding has nothing to do with money.

Choice Based Lettings Scheme

A system for letting affordable housing which allows housing applicants more choice by advertising vacancies and inviting applicants to express interest in being the tenant. This also raises awareness of what vacancies are being advertised to relet.

Disabled

Persons who have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on their ability to do normal daily activities as set out in the Equality Act 2010.

Effective Date

The date when the application is awarded priority and placed in a different band, which may be a later date than the date on which the application was originally made. This is the date used to decide the order of priority band applicants in the Platinum Gold and Silver bands in the bidding shortlist.

Eligibility

Assessment of whether an applicant has a right to access social housing in accordance with relevant legislation.

Housing Association/Registered Provider

A provider of affordable housing, including supported accommodation, who advertises a percentage of their vacancies through the Choice Based Lettings Scheme.

Housing Need

Applicants are assessed as having a housing need if the accommodation they currently occupy is unsuitable and where applicants are unable to resolve their circumstances. This can be as a result of ill health, overcrowding, lacking facilities or the applicant is otherwise deemed to be in a reasonable preference group as defined in housing law.

Housing Register

The list of applicants eligible to use the Choice Based Lettings scheme. In order to bid for a property, the applicant must be on the Housing Register.

Housing Related Debt

Monies owed to a landlord, such as a Local Authority, Housing Association, Arm's Length Management Company or for temporary housing accommodation provided under homeless duties, hostels or supported housing projects, in respect of current or former tenancies. It can also include other debts such as re-chargeable repairs, court cost, support charges and prevention fund monies (e.g. bonds, rent in advance). Debts written off as part of bankruptcy or which are statute barred will be disregarded. DEBT means TRUE debt and does not include arrears where the housing provider is in receipt of regular housing benefit payment or direct debit / standing order which clear the rent account. Housing related debt does not include council tax debts.

Intentionally Homeless

A person's homelessness, or threat of homelessness, was caused by something that they deliberately did or failed to do.

Introductory Tenancy

An initial 12-month tenancy granted to new council tenants. The introductory tenancy is a trial period for the tenant to demonstrate to the Council that they can maintain their tenancy agreement.

Local Connection

Connection to a particular area because of residency, employment, family or a main source of support.

Localism Act 2011

Legislation which has amended powers and duties of a local authority regarding the allocation of properties.

Locality

Local authority area in which the applicant currently lives.

Local Lettings Policy (LLP)

A time limited policy, which is introduced to take account of local circumstances. Examples of this may be where a new housing development becomes available or where there is severe anti-social behaviour concentrated in a particular area. This means that these properties will be let outside of the housing allocations policy. Each scheme will establish the criteria that will be used. These criteria will vary dependent upon the circumstances that led to the LLP.

Mutual Exchange

Where two or more social housing tenants swap their homes with the permission of their landlord. Each tenant agrees to move into the others home on an 'as seen' basis.

Priority Need

An individual who would be more vulnerable than other applicants if they were made homeless e.g. families with children.

Qualification

Assessment of whether an applicant qualifies to join the register under the qualification criteria set by Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council.

Reasonable Preference Category

The phrase used in the Housing Act 1996, Localism Act 2011 & Homelessness Act 2002 to describe those types of housing need that should be given priority in a local authority's allocations policy.

Registration Date

The date a complete application, with all required supporting information, is received. This date may be used as a tie-breaker to decide who receives an offer of accommodation. Applicants in the Bronze, General Band and Transfer List are held in registration date order.

Relief Duty

Where the council is satisfied that an applicant is homeless and eligible, it must take reasonable steps to help the applicant secure accommodation that becomes available for at least six months.

Resettlement Pathway

A structured programme of supported housing for rough sleepers, young people and those who are homeless to develop independent living skills.

Sensitive Let

Where an individual property is advertised subject to additional checks.

Single Point of Access Team

A team within our Home Options service who work with supported housing providers to access accommodation and support the move to independent living.

Transfer List

A list of council tenants held in date order who do not have an assessed housing need. Applicants on this list will be considered after applicants in other bands on the housing register with the exception of the General Band and where there is an assessed need for adapted accommodation.

Under-Occupying

Where a household is occupying accommodation that is larger than their maximum room entitlement.

Unintentionally Homeless

A person's homelessness, or threat of homelessness, was not caused by something that they deliberately did or failed to do.

2 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 (SLHD).

2.1 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, let our properties and undertake our statutory duties to ensure that reasonable preference is given to applicants in housing need
- Making **best** use of our housing stock
- Supporting stable and vibrant communities by creating sustainable tenancies
- Fulfilling our obligations under Part VI and VII of the Housing Act 1996 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 **Homelessness and Rough Sleeping, and** Tenancy Strategies. Doncaster Council and SLHD are committed to making sure that people are treated fairly and allocations are effectively monitored

2.2 Legal Framework

The Housing Act 1996 part VI ("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 5.

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 (see section 2.4).

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 the best use of its social housing stock.

~~'Guidance for Local Authorities in England on the Allocation of Accommodation'~~ The government has issued statutory guidance which is updated periodically. Local authorities are required to have regard to this guidance when exercising their functions under Part VI 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 VI of the 1996 Act.

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

2.3 Related Strategies

This policy has regard to:

- Doncaster Council's Housing Strategy
- Doncaster Council's Tenancy Strategy
- Doncaster Council's Place Plan
- Doncaster Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

2.4 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 for. 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.

2.5 Suspension of the Housing Register

Doncaster Council reserves the right to suspend the Housing Register and allocations process in response to an emergency situation and/or extraordinary circumstances where there is an overwhelming short term demand on available housing stock. This decision will be made by SLHD's Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with Doncaster Council's Housing Portfolio Holder.

3 Eligibility

All applicants 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 applicants that they have the right to a review, as outlined in section 8.

3.1 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~~ **eligible**
- 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~~ **offer a joint tenancy** to two or more people 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 1996 Housing Act 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 onto the register does not guarantee that the ~~person~~ **applicant** 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~~ **applicant's** circumstances changed and they are no longer eligible, their application will be removed from the housing register.

4 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 8.

4.1 Who does not qualify?

- Applicants without a local connection (see section 4.2)
- 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, predominately 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, SLHD, Registered Providers, previous landlords or the police or if they have been a tenant considered in breach of their tenancy. Each case will be assessed on its own merits.
- Applicants or members of their household with a history of significant unsatisfactory tenancy conduct or behaviour
- 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, where we will disregard former rent arrears.

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.

Qualification for an allocation may change over time (e.g. where there has been a change in the law) therefore, acceptance onto the register does not guarantee that the person will be allocated accommodation. Qualification will be confirmed again at the point of consideration of making an offer of accommodation and on review of an application. Where a person's circumstances have changed and they no longer qualify, their application will be removed from the housing register.

Where an applicant has previously been assessed as not to qualify, they can make a new application if they consider that they should now be treated as qualifying, but it will be for the applicant to show that their circumstances have changed.

4.2 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 of 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 etc. or where they have been rehoused in temporary accommodation in the area by another Local 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

4.3 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, civil partners **or divorced/separated partners** of member of the armed forces leaving service family accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner **or relationship breakdown**
- Serving or former members of the reserved forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a 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
- **Domestic Abuse Victims living in refuge accommodation in the borough where they have not had a statutory homeless decision with another Local Authority, and returning to an area would put them at risk**
- 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 SLHD
- Doncaster Council tenants who are assessed into a priority band of Platinum, Gold or Silver
- Doncaster Council tenants on the separate Transfer List who have lived in their current tenancy for a minimum of 12 months

4.4 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. **Where the applicant fails to do so, we will not progress their application.**

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

- Two forms of identification, one of which shows their current address, and one of 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 the applicant has been resident at the current address for less than 12 months
- A satisfactory home visit and rental statement and confirmation of no known antisocial 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.

4.5 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. 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 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, they will not qualify to join the housing register**

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

4.6 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. We may also offer tenancy support to applicants at risk of tenancy failure before they are rehoused.

~~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 also 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. SLHD 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.

4.7 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 the Housing Assessment Panel (see section 7.6). The panel will consider the evidence provided and a decision will be made as 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.

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

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

4.9 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/registration 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.

This includes owner-occupiers who choose to sell their home, without first securing alternative suitable accommodation, when it would have been reasonable for them to remain.

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 of the Housing Act 1985 (as amended by section 146 of the Housing Act 1996).

4.10 Suspensions

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

- Certain criminal convictions
- Prisoners who do not have a release date
- If we find out that you may 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 **or supported housing** 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 **on review** 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

Suspension penalties for refusal of a reasonable offer of accommodation are for 6 months in the following circumstances:

- Applicants in the Platinum Band who have refused one suitable offer
- Homeless applicants in all bands who have refused one suitable offer these include Statutory Homeless applicants, those at risk of homelessness, under relief, in prevention, homeless at home, intentionally homeless and homeless non priority
- Applicants in all other bands who have bid and then refused two offers. This includes refusals of adapted accommodation which would have been suitable

All homeless applicants will also have their homeless priority removed and application reassessed.

4.11 Right to Not Offer a Property

The Council reserves the right to not offer a property following verification checks made at the offer stage, or additional information being received. Examples of circumstances where this applies include but are not limited to:

- Where the property is not large enough and would result in statutory overcrowding or unacceptable and cramped living conditions
- Where applicants or members of their household have been given priority to move to a particular location and bid on a property not within or close to the agreed location
- Where applicants or members of their household have specific needs for a property with certain access and bathing facilities to meet their medical needs and the property does not meet these criteria
- Where the behaviour or lifestyle of applicants or members of their household will not support a sustainable tenancy, for example where this will negatively impact residents in a sheltered housing bungalow or flat complex
- Where applicants or members of their household have been involved in anti-social or criminal behaviour in the last 12 months
- Where the applicant or members of their household have breached a condition of their current tenancy e.g. rent arrears
- Where applicants or members of their household do not meet the criteria of a Local Lettings Policy applied to a particular property or area
- Where the property is no longer available

Where the Council has reserved the right not to offer a property, the applicant will be notified in writing of the reasons for this decision and inform the applicant that they have the right to a review, as outlined in section 8.

5 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 also 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 **as this may be a more realistic way to move due to the demand for properties.**

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.

5.1 Platinum Band

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

Applicants who are assessed as being statutory homeless under part VII of the Housing Act 1996 and are owed the full housing duty.

We will award Platinum Band from the decision date if alternative suitable private rented accommodation or alternative suitable 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 can be made to discharge the full housing duty. Timescales for this are dependent on circumstances and housing supply.

Applicants who are assessed as having limited housing options in the Homeless relief duty or in temporary accommodation.

Where homelessness cannot be prevented and the applicant is owed a relief duty under Section 189B of the Housing Act 1996, is in priority need and the local authority is not minded to believe that the household has become intentionally homeless, or where the applicant is placed in temporary accommodation under s188 and the local authority is not minded to believe they are intentionally homeless.

This priority will only be awarded where the applicant has limited housing options and we are unable to access the private rented sector or alternative suitable accommodation. This is subject to assessment by our Home Options Service.

Former Statutory Homeless applicants who reapply within two years of acceptance of a private rented sector offer under section 195A(1).

The section 193(2) duty will apply regardless of whether the applicant has a priority need where:

- a) a person makes a re-application for assistance within two years of accepting a private rented sector offer under section 193(7AA); and,
- b) the applicant is eligible for assistance and has become homeless unintentionally

Applicants in the Resettlement Pathway ready for independent living

Platinum banding will only be awarded where the applicant's engagement in the 'Resettlement Pathway' is confirmed by the Single Point of Access (SPOA) Team. The SPOA Team will confirm engagement where individuals meet the criteria below:

- The individual was placed via Home Options and SPOA Team from the start of their supported accommodation placement
- The individual has successfully completed a period of support
- The Individual has an up-to-date rent account and service charge
- Local connection rules apply in relation to the allocations policy
- The vacancy created by moving the individual on will be made available by the provider to Home Options SPOA Team as part of continued flow through the Supported Pathway
- Individuals will not be considered to be engaging in the resettlement pathway if they are refusing other suitable and reasonable move-on options such as Private rented sector or non-commissioned supported accommodation

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 the 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 SLHD. 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.

The 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 decided 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 with 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
- Divorced or separated 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.

Tenants releasing a council house by moving into a bungalow or flat.

This priority will be awarded where the tenant has complied with the terms of their tenancy agreement and the current property is found to be in a satisfactory condition. This will be confirmed by the Housing Management Team.

5.2 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 (aged 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, 1 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 take a pragmatic approach where an offer of accommodation will significantly improve the circumstances of the applicant. We will not rehouse an applicant into accommodation that results in them being statutory overcrowded **or living in unacceptable and cramped living conditions**

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 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 will 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 applicant's 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 a progressive medical condition. We will 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 **and the frequency of care**.

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

Applicants in service tenancies.

Applicants 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 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.

At risk of homelessness.

Applicants who **are eligible and qualify to join the housing register** and have been assessed by Doncaster Council's Home Options Service as at risk of homelessness, have a local connection, 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. **This includes where a need to move to prevent homelessness is agreed by Housing Options as part of the customer's Personal Housing Plan.**

Violence or Harassment.

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.

Supported planned move due to Domestic Abuse.

Where an applicant who is being supported by agencies as needing to make a planned move due to Domestic Abuse rather than remain in their current home. We will ensure that the property type and location supports a risk management plan.

5.3 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 are 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 (aged 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, 1 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 take a pragmatic approach to the size of the property where an offer of accommodation will significantly improve the circumstances of the applicant.

We will not rehouse an applicant into accommodation that results in them being statutory overcrowded **or unacceptable and cramped living conditions**

Non-priority homeless.

Applicants **who qualify to join the housing register and** 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.

Intentionally homeless.

Applicants **who qualify to join the housing register and** ~~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.

~~If no bids have been placed in the last 12 months, the application will be cancelled.~~

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

This includes 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

~~All applicants will be assessed by Doncaster HomeChoice~~ **will assess all applicants** and Silver priority will be awarded based on individual need where an applicant needs to move to a particular locality and hardship would be caused if they did not 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. This category includes applicants who are 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.

5.4 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 1 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.

5.5 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 **do not meet the criteria of** 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 into 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.~~

5.6 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, they 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 including, the disposal of a property either below the market value or at nil value and any ongoing right of occupation.

5.7 What is the different between an effective date and registration date?

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 you 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, their application will be 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

5.8 Number of Offers and Removal of Priority

~~Applicants who are in the Platinum Band and have been assessed as Full Duty Homeless in accordance with part VII of the Housing Act 1996 and the Homeless 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 of the Housing Act 1996.~~

~~Applicants who are assessed into the Bronze and General bands who refuse three suitable offers of accommodation will have their application suspended for six months.~~

Offers of accommodation are limited on the following basis.

- One suitable offer of accommodation will be made to all Platinum Band applicants
- One suitable offer of accommodation will be made to Homeless applicants in all bands including Statutory Homeless applicants, those at risk of homelessness, under relief, in prevention, homeless at home, intentionally homeless and homeless non priority
- Two suitable offers will be made to all other categories of applicants in all other bands
- This includes refusals of adapted accommodation where the applicant has either bid or been nominated for the property and where it would have been suitable

All homeless applicants will have their homeless priority removed after one reasonable offer of accommodation and suspended for six months. All other applicants will be suspended for six months.

A suitable offer includes a direct offer as well as those where an applicant has placed a bid, and will take into account location, size and any assessed needs of the applicant including medical, access to existing schools and access to give or receive care. A suitable offer may not be in the applicant's preferred location.

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.

6 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.

6.1 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 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 the Doncaster Children's Trust Council's Children, Young People and Families Service and the 16/17 year old protocol.

In these circumstances, applicants will be allocated a License Agreement/~~Equitable tenancy~~ until they are 18 when, subject to suitable conduct, they will be offered an introductory 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 8 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. ~~These cases will be reviewed and a decision made by a manager.~~

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. **We will verify an application before making an offer of accommodation and this may result in it being suspended where applicants do not meet this criteria.**

- Prisoners

Prisoners' housing applications will be activated when they have their release date confirmed. 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 **bypass an applicant on the shortlist**, adjust the property eligibility rules, banding order or allocate the property by Direct Match. This is in exceptional cases only **and is in the interest of supporting community cohesion and tenancy sustainability. Any bypassed applicants will have the right to review this decision as outlined in section 8.**

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

Details of applicants' property eligibility ~~The Property Eligibility Table~~ can be found in Appendix A (The Property Eligibility Table). Where a property does not meet the identified housing needs of an applicant, any offer may be withdrawn. **The Property Eligibility Table** may be reviewed separately to the Housing Allocations Policy by a nominated officer in SLHD and Doncaster Council.

6.3 Restrictions on Flats and Bungalows

There are certain circumstances where we restrict access to the property type based on factors such as age, disability, 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 properties, we usually restrict access to people aged 60 and over or those who have been assessed by an Occupational Therapist or Assessment Officer as requiring a certain type of adapted accommodation or facility. **Where a property is age designated and we advertise to applicants under 60, we will consider applicants aged 60 and over first and remaining applicants in band order.** General band applicants will be considered after applicants in all other bands as above. If the property is adapted, priority will be given to applicants with an assessed need for adaptations first including those under 60. 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 (AHR) to ensure best use of housing stock.

6.4 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 18, to stay at least two nights in every week. We will require proof of access.

Due to the lack of family houses becoming available to relet, this property type will be restricted to the main carer and dependents.

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.

Due to the lack of 4+ bedroomed houses, we will prioritise Platinum and Gold band applicants with larger families for this type of accommodation before applicants who can be suitably housed in smaller accommodation.

We will take a pragmatic approach to property size where an applicant is overcrowded, when an offer of larger accommodation will significantly improve the circumstances of the applicant.

We will not make an offer of a property if it will result in statutory overcrowding **or unacceptable and cramped living conditions.**

6.5 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.

7 Advertising and Letting Properties

This section explains how Doncaster HomeChoice will advertise available properties, sort the bids once the advertising cycle has closed and then offer properties to the successful applicants.

Properties will be advertised in accordance with the publicised cycle.

7.1 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 advertising cycle and reused on alternative properties.

There is no advantage to bidding at the beginning of the advertising cycle, as properties are not let on a first come first serve basis.

When the advertising 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 them 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 Council's Accessible Housing Register (AHR), **and sheltered accommodation outlined in section 7.8.**

7.2 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

Applicants who do not meet the qualification requirements as detailed in section 4.1 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.

Where we have lower demand properties that we may not be able to let to applicants on the housing register, we will advertise these properties on our website and 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.

7.3 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 advertising cycle, they will be contacted and asked which property they prefer, unless they are currently under offer for a property advertised in a previous 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 **current** 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.

7.4 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. **Applicants must also make themselves available and respond to any contact within this timescale or they may be bypassed if we are unable to contact them.**

7.5 Will all properties be advertised to bid on?

All properties will be advertised to bid on with the exception of properties 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
- **Properties identified for temporary accommodation which will be passed to the Home Options Service**
- **Housing Management purposes** such as decanting during major refurbishment, use as temporary accommodation or allocation to an applicant on the Transfer List as a direct let. Also during situations where the rehousing of a household must be a managed process and it is inappropriate to advertise or for 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 **and managed by Doncaster Council's Adult Services**
- **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 timeframe 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.

7.6 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. **If a direct match is agreed, this will be on a one offer basis and may not be in the preferred area of the applicant.**

7.7 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.

5% of properties will be advertised to applicants in lower bands to support sustainable communities. The bidding priority will be clearly labelled on the advert. Allocations will include new build council homes.

~~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 **or** sensitive lets or fasttrack 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.~~

7.8 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 Council's AHR.

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

7.9 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.

7.10 Type of tenancy that will be offered

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

7.11 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 that affects their application, where false information has been given or where 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.

7.12 Offers to Employees/Elected Members/Board Members

In order to ensure that we are treating all applicants fairly, any applications from employees of Doncaster Council or SLHD, Elected Members or SLHD 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 SLHD or an appropriate designated officer.

7.13 Joint Tenancies

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

- Married couples
- Applicants living together as a couple
- A person on the register who wants a joint tenancy with someone who has also made an application

Where 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 part is not eligible or where the property is purpose built or extensively adapted. Spouses and registered civil partners will be considered.

7.14 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 be suspended from the transfer register for six months.

As outlined in section 5.8, the number of offers are limited dependent on the circumstances and band of an applicant.

The majority of offers made are as a result of an applicant placing a bid on a property although direct offers are made in certain circumstances as outlined in section 7.5. An offer will be considered suitable where it meets any identified needs of an applicant which include but are not limited to:

- Access to existing schools
- Access to current employment
- Access to give/receive care
- Access to support networks for the vulnerable
- Meeting assessed medical needs
- Reduce risk of violence

Due to the demand for and lack of available accommodation this may not be in the applicant's preferred location.

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 8.

7.15 Right to Buy

Council tenants have the 'Right to Buy'. There are rules around who can do this.

Certain properties remain exempt from the Right to Buy scheme, including housing for older people and significantly adapted properties.

8 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.

8.1 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 applicant 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

8.2 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.

9 Other Housing Options

This section details other options open to applicants on Doncaster Council's housing register **which may be more realistic ways of finding alternative accommodation.**

9.1 Mutual Exchanges

Secure council and tenants of other Housing Associations/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.

9.2 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.

9.3 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.

9.4 Private Rented Accommodation

Our Home Options Service gives advice about options and access to the Private Rented Sector. This may be a more realistic way of being rehoused.

SLHD manage and let certain properties that 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.

10 Sharing 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.~~

Information provided when anyone makes an application to join the housing register and any information received in administering and processing an application will be treated as confidential in accordance with any relevant data protection regulations / legislation and in line with our privacy notices.

Information provided may also need to be shared with other 3rd party organisations (such as Partner Landlords and other agencies such as the police, probation service, social services, health authorities, other local authority departments and statutory bodies) to process your housing application and assess your housing need.

Information may be shared without the applicant's specific consent in the prevention and/or detection of crime, the prevention and/or detection of fraud, in matters relating to safeguarding of an individual or others and/or any rule of common law and where necessary under the clauses or exemptions of the Data Protection Legislation and other statute and legal obligations.

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Appendix A: Property Eligibility Table

| Description | Type | | | | | Bedrooms | |
|--|--------|------|----------|------------|-------|----------|---------|
| | Bedsit | Flat | Bungalow | Maisonette | House | Minimum | Maximum |
| Single person | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | 1 | 2 |
| Single person + overnight access to 1 child | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | 1 | 2 |
| Single person + overnight access to 2 or more children | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | 1 | 3 |
| 2 adults | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | 1 | 2 |
| Couple | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | 1 | 2 |
| Household + 1 child | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | 3 |
| Household + 2 children | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | 3 |
| 3 adults | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | 3 |
| Household + 3 children | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 3 | 4 |
| Household + 4 children | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 3 | 4 |
| Household + 5 or more children | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 3* | 5 |
| 4 adults | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | 4 |

*Three bed accommodation will only be allocated if it does not result in a household being **statutory overcrowded or living in unacceptable and cramped living conditions.**

Bungalows and age-designated flats will initially be given to customers 60+ years old (with the exception of applicants in the General Band) and to those with an assessed medical need for such accommodation.

Adapted properties – additional priority will be given to applicants assessed as requiring the adaptations already carried out to the property.

Bedroom allocations for applicants with children are dependent on their age.

Four bed and larger accommodation – additional priority will be given to applicants with a 4/5/6 bedroom housing need in the Platinum and Gold Bands due to the lack of housing stock.