

Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
GYPSY AND TRAVELLERS ALLOCATION POLICY

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This policy sets out how Doncaster Council allocates available pitches on the sites under its management and ownership. This policy is based on a banding system designed to meet housing need and as such gives priority to those in the greatest of need when pitches become available.
- 1.2 As we do not have enough pitches to meet demand from everyone who has registered interest, we need to have a system in place which aims to give priority for pitches to those who are in most housing need. In this way we can make every effort to ensure and evidence that pitches are allocated on a transparent and fair basis in accordance with a documented policy.
- 1.3 The aims of the policy are to ensure that the allocations of pitches on Council sites are made in a fair and transparent manner, and that those in the greatest need are assisted in securing accommodation. The Council aims to provide appropriate accommodation and support services to Gypsies and Travellers on the sites it manages, which respect their culture and traditions and helps to address some of the discrimination they face. The Council also wishes to ensure the effective management of its sites and the protection of existing residents.
- 1.4 The Council understands that Traveller communities are diverse, but that many Gypsies and Travellers choose to live within small kin-based groups where they can enjoy the benefits of their extended family support which is an essential part of their culture. The Council will give preference to those families or individuals with a local connection.
- 1.5 Doncaster has ensured the provision of its sites specifically to meet the needs of the local Gypsy and Traveller community. Therefore to apply for a pitch applicants must be a Gypsy or Traveller either by ethnic group or under the current legal definition. Gypsies are defined in law as 'persons of a nomadic habit of life, whatever their race or origin' (CSCDA 1960, s.24, as amended by the 1994 Act s.80).

SECTION 2: APPLICATIONS

- 2.1 Applicants can express their wish to be included on the waiting list for a pitch by making contact with the Council's Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Team:

Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Team
Doncaster Council
Kings Mews
64 – 66 East Laith Gate
Doncaster
DN1 1JD

Tel: 01302 862055

- 2.2 Every applicant must make a formal application through completion of an application form, although enquiries are welcomed in person. The Gypsy Traveller team will provide support in completing this information where necessary.
- 2.3 An application form will be provided to applicants that have resided in Doncaster for a continuous period of three months or where a local connection can be clearly demonstrated. A local connection is defined as:
- a) Continuous residence in Doncaster for at least 6 out of the last 12 months or 3 out of the last 5 years.
 - b) Where a close family member (parent child or sibling of the applicant) has lived in Doncaster for at least 5 years.
- 2.4 Evidence of residence could be demonstrated by one of the following: Electoral Register, Council Tax/Housing Benefit records, Working Tax Credit documents, Child Benefit documents, VAT or Income Tax documents, school attendance documents.

N.B: Letters from GP's or hospitals are not accepted since experience shows that patients will often remain with the same doctor when they change address.

- 2.5 An application will remain inactive until we receive all the information we require to complete a full assessment of the application. This means that we cannot allocate a pitch to the applicant during this period. All applications will be subject to initial enquires and references.
- 2.6 Applicants must provide the names and addresses of two referees, preferably from recent landlords. Applicants may be excluded from inclusion on the waiting list if they are unwilling to provide referees or the references subsequently received give serious grounds for concern.

- 2.7 Applicants will be invited to meet with the Gypsy & Traveller Officer to verify the information disclosed on the application, and to undertake an assessment of housing and support needs. This will enable us to look at putting in place support mechanisms before a tenancy is started.
- 2.8 Once an applicant's application has been accepted, they will be placed on the waiting list in one of the four priority bands. Our priority bands are: Platinum, Gold, Silver, and Bronze. Platinum band reflects the highest priority. A full list of the bands and the circumstances for being in a band is detailed below.

How the Banding Scheme Works

- 2.9 This section details the banding scheme which determines the priority given to an applicant. Priority for vacancies will be given to applicants in the highest band. If there is more than one applicant in the highest band at the time of allocation, preference will be given to the applicant whose application for re-housing was accepted first.
- 2.10 Needs are assessed as follows:

Platinum (Emergency & High Priority)

- Urgent medical need
- Households who the law considers to be unintentionally homeless and in priority need
- Applicants with children
- Urgent social need (fleeing violence / harassment)

Gold

- Applicants with children / large families whose current home is statutorily overcrowded
- Prevention of homelessness
- In critical need due to medical / health or welfare reasons
- Lack of facilities in current provision

Silver

- Local connection
- Substantial need due to medical / health welfare reasons
- Homeless without priority
- Intentionally homeless with a priority need

Bronze

Applicants from outside the local area will automatically be placed in bronze, unless:

- They are classed as having Homeless Priority in Doncaster e.g. Fleeing domestic violence

Exclusions

2.11 Doncaster Council wishes to ensure that its sites are well managed and that the communities within sites can have peaceful enjoyment of their homes. To ensure this, the Council will not allocate pitches to the following persons:

- Under 18's (unless exceptional circumstances apply and an appropriate support package is in place)
- Applicants who own property within the locality that they can be reasonably expected to occupy
- Applicants who have carried out malicious damage to property and / or unpaid rechargeable repairs
- Applicants who have been violent to or threatened staff or agents of Doncaster Council, previous landlords or the police
- Applicants owing money to Doncaster Council (or with a poor payment record on previous sites) or with unsettled accounts with other local authorities relating to both site and non-site related issues
- Applicants (or persons within the household) with a history of anti social / unacceptable behaviour that would have lead (or previously did lead) the Council to obtain a possession order against them if they had been a Council tenant (this includes households who have not held a Council tenancy, but whose behaviour was such that had they been a Council tenant, the Council would have obtained a possession order against them)
- Perpetrators of anti social behaviour

2.12 Anti social / unacceptable behaviour, for the purpose of this policy include, but are not restricted to:

- Convictions for violent / serious offences
- Convictions for drug use / drug dealing
- Anti social / threatening behaviour towards neighbours and the local community
- Moving onto sites without advance permission
- Breach of tenancy agreement

2.13 Exclusions from the waiting list will be for an initial period of one year from application. Applicants can then reapply if their circumstances have changes (e.g. debts have been cleared, track record of behaviour has demonstrably improved) then a new application will be considered after this time.

2.14 Any applicant facing exclusion will receive a letter from the Council setting out the reasons for exclusion and offering the right to appeal. The applicant will be contacted verbally to have the reasons explained fully by the Gypsy & Traveller Officer.

Risk and Needs Assessment

2.15 Decisions about managing risk will involve information sharing between partner agencies, including: the Police, Safer Neighbourhood Teams,

Probation Services, Social Services, Health Professionals, and other relevant bodies.

- 2.16 If an applicant has provided incorrect information or has failed to declare any information which is relevant to their application, they may be removed from the waiting list.
- 2.17 Applicants have the right to appeal against this decision within 28 days of being notified.

Appeals

- 2.18 All applicants have the right to appeal both in relation to exclusions and banding. Applicants who disagree with their banding or with the decision to exclude can appeal in writing or in person to the **Senior Housing Options Officer (Gypsies & Travellers) at Doncaster Council on: 01302 862055**. Appeals against decisions must be made within 28 days of notification being received by the applicant.

Compatibility – Local Connection

- 2.19 Due to the compact nature of gypsy and traveller sites and the close proximity of pitches; the compatibility of a new tenant with existing tenants is very important. This close proximity can give rise to very serious problems not only for other site residents, but for the management of the site and for the local community. Incompatibility can occur for a variety of reasons such as religious practices, kinship, life style and personality. It is naïve to expect two families on a Gypsy and Traveller site who are incompatible, because of one or more reasons stated, to live in close proximity without creating problems for themselves, the Council and the surrounding community. Any final decision about applicants for re-housing on a site will be taken after full consideration with other households accommodated on the site, to ensure their kinship networks are not disrupted, and their cultural needs are respected. The Council, via the Gypsy and Traveller Team may be aware of reasons why an applicant would be incompatible for allocation of a pitch on a particular site. It is important that this information is taken into account at the time of allocation. Where issues of incompatibility would appear to make an allocation unwise, the Senior Housing Options Officer (Gypsy and Travellers) would seek authority from the Housing Options Manager to offer the pitch to the next highest waiting list applicant.

SECTION 3: ALLOCATION OF A PITCH

- 3.1 An offer of a pitch will be made both verbally and in writing.
- 3.2 Applicants will have no legal right to the pitch until the Council has approved their application and they have entered into a tenancy/licence agreement. Payment of a £100 bond is required before the new resident can sign for their new tenancy.
- 3.3 The Gypsy and Traveller Officer will ensure that the new residents sign their tenancy agreement, ensuring they understand their rights and responsibilities set out within it.
- 3.4 If an applicant fails to make contact with the Gypsy and Traveller Officer after a period of 5 working days, the Council may withdraw the offer of a pitch and allocate it to the next appropriate applicant.

Change of Circumstance

- 3.5 Applicants must ensure that the Gypsy and Traveller Officers are informed of any changes of address or circumstances within the household. Any changes will lead to a reassessment of banding.

Confidentiality

- 3.6 All information provided will be treated confidentially and all enquiries will be made in a sensitive and appropriate manner. The application form requests permission from applicants to discuss their case with appropriate agencies.

Reviewing the Waiting List

- 3.7 The Gypsy and Traveller officer will review the waiting list annually to confirm that all applicants are still waiting for a pitch. Good contact details must be provided by each applicant to ensure that communication can take place.