

DRAFT
Coventry
Homefinder
Policy



Coventry
HOMEFINDER

Letting you choose

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Section 1 – Introduction to Coventry Homefinder

1.1 Background

This Policy provides a framework for the delivery of choice based lettings services and the allocation of social housing in Coventry through the Coventry Homefinder system.

The Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England 2012 states “we expect social homes to go to people who genuinely need them”. In applying this principle and in consideration of the high demand for social housing in Coventry, the allocation of social housing will be prioritised to customers who have an assessed housing need.

The Council no longer owns any housing following the Large Scale Voluntary Transfer of all the former Council housing to Whitefriars Housing Group in September 2000. The local authority is still required to have an allocation scheme for determining how allocations are made in order that those who have the greatest need for housing are prioritised.

The term used throughout the document for providers of social housing is ‘Registered Provider’. This is a term used to describe a provider of social housing who is registered with the Homes and Communities Agency. These are usually Housing Associations. The term ‘Partner Registered Provider’ is used for Registered Providers who are partners in the Coventry Homefinder Partnership.

1.2 The Coventry Homefinder Partnership

The Coventry Homefinder Partnership (referred to as “the partnership” throughout this document) was established in 2007 between Coventry City Council and Registered Providers (providers of social and affordable housing – usually housing associations) to provide a choice based lettings service for the allocation of social housing.

Coventry City Council is the lead organisation for administering the statutory duties of social housing allocation in Coventry. Nominations are made to the Partner Registered Provider landlords in accordance with this policy.

Partner Registered Providers participating in Coventry Homefinder include:

- Ashram Housing
- Asra Housing Group
- Bromford Group
- Guinness Northern Counties
- Jephson Housing Association Group
- Mercian Housing Association
- Midland Heart
- Nehemiah and United Churches Housing Association
- Orbit Heart of England

Starley Housing Co-operative
Whitefriars Housing

Coventry Homefinder also has a partnership board to co-ordinate the choice based lettings scheme which includes:

Coventry City Council
Whitefriars Housing
Midland Heart
Orbit Heart of England
Jephson Housing Association Group (representing all of the smaller housing associations)
Advice Services Coventry

The role of the partnership board is to:

- Monitor the effective running of the choice based lettings service
- Discuss issues of concern that may impact on the provision of social housing
- Consider changes that are made to the policy and the operating system
- Highlight challenges that organisations are independently experiencing in delivering services
- In special circumstances, the partnership board will also consider individual customer cases that might require consideration of priority banding or specific resources outside of the normal policy framework

1.3 Aims of the Coventry Homefinder Policy

This policy aims to provide a transparent social housing allocation service which:

- Complies with the legal framework in which social housing allocations are made
- Ensures that those in the greatest housing need are given appropriate “reasonable priority preference” and/or “additional priority preference”
- Offers realistic, informed choice for all applicants through choice based lettings
- Makes the best use of the limited affordable housing provision in the city
- Creates sustainable communities where people want to live and work, and where they feel safe
- Provides information and guidance regarding the use of the operating system to deliver the service
- Ensures that every application is dealt with fairly and consistently.

1.4 Statement on Choice

The partnership is fully committed to enabling applicants to play an active role in choosing where they want to live, whilst continuing to prioritise those people in the greatest need, making the best use of the available housing stock and complying with all relevant legislation.

It is important to realise that the demand for accommodation is higher for some types of property and for some areas of the city than it is for others. In making a decision about the choices available, applicants need to consider their housing need priority against the availability of properties in any given area.

The Coventry Homefinder Scheme allows people to see the Partner Registered Providers' properties that are available and place a bid on (express an interest in) those properties they are eligible for and would like to be considered for during each bidding period.

Applicants will be informed of their relative position on the shortlist for that vacancy at the time of making the bid. This enables an applicant to make an informed choice when deciding which property to express an interest in/bid on and whether to consider alternative housing options. Feedback on lettings of previously advertised properties is also available.

1.5 The Legal Framework

This document sets out the Coventry Homefinder Choice Based Lettings Policy, which determines the priorities and procedure for nominating applicants to Registered Providers in accordance with Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Localism Act 2011.

The Policy ensures that reasonable preference is given to applicants who fall within the reasonable preference categories in accordance with section 166A(3) of the Housing Act 1996. More detail on reasonable preference is set out in section 3.

This Policy also sets out the priorities and procedures for nominations of existing social housing tenants who do not fall into the groups to whom reasonable preference must be given, in line with Section 145 of the Localism Act 2011. These will be considered for allocation under the same policy framework.

All nominations will be made in accordance with this Policy.

This Policy has been developed with regard to the statutory guidance issued to local housing authorities in England (Allocation of Accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England, Department for Communities and Local Government, issued June 2012).

In addition, the Policy reflects the wider strategic aims of Coventry City Council, including those contained in the Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy, the Coventry Housing & Homelessness Strategy and the Coventry Tenancy Strategy.

1.6 Equality and fairness

In framing this Policy, the Council has had regard to its duties under the Equality Act 2010. The Policy seeks to ensure that each application is dealt with fairly and consistently, irrespective of race, age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief, and to comply with all relevant legislation.

1.7 Advice and information

A clear summary of this scheme is available to all applicants. The full copy of this policy will be available to view on request from the Coventry Housing and Benefits Advice Centre or it can be downloaded from the website: www.coventryhomefinder.com

The Council has a duty to people in its area to ensure that:

- Advice and information about the right to make an application for housing is available free of charge
- Assistance is given free of charge to those who are likely to have difficulty in making an application for housing without such assistance.

Applicants also have the right to the following general information:

- Information that will enable them to assess how their application is likely to be treated under the authority's allocation scheme and in particular, whether they are likely to fall within the reasonable preference categories.
- Information about whether accommodation appropriate to their needs is likely to be made available and, if so, how long it is likely to be before such accommodation becomes available.

Information about previous lettings and previous availability of properties is published on the Homefinder website (see section 4.15 for more detail).

Section 2 – Joining the Register

2.1 Who can register with Coventry Homefinder?

Anyone over 16 years of age, who is eligible and who meets the qualifying criteria may apply to Coventry Homefinder. (See below for eligibility and qualifying criteria).

Partner Registered Providers have different policies in dealing with persons under the age of 18. Registered Providers will not normally allow an allocation of accommodation to anyone under the age of 18 years. However there may be exceptional circumstances where a tenancy can be held in trust by a guarantor (for example where a young person leaving care is referred by childrens' social care services, where they agree to hold the tenancy in trust and where a suitable support package is in place).

2.2 Who cannot register with Coventry Homefinder? - Eligibility Criteria

An applicant may be ineligible for an allocation of accommodation under Section 160ZA of the Housing Act 1996. A person will be ineligible for a housing allocation if they are:

- a person from abroad who is subject to immigration control within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 (defined as a person that requires leave to enter or remain in the UK), unless he or she comes within a class prescribed in regulations by the Secretary of State.
- a person who is not subject to immigration control but who is not habitually resident in the Common Travel Area (United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, Channel Islands and the Isle of Man).

Citizens of the United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, Channel Islands and the Isle of Man who have returned following a period of living abroad will have to pass the Habitual Residence test in order to be eligible.

Eligibility will be considered at the time of application and at the time of an offer of allocation to a property. Applicants must inform Coventry Homefinder of any change in their immigration status.

If an applicant is found to be ineligible, they will be notified of the decision and the reasons for it in writing and informed of their right to request a review.

The guidance above is not wholly prescriptive nor is its intention to fully explain the law. More detail is available in Chapter 3 and Annex 2,3 and 4 of the guidance document "Allocation of Accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England" (DCLG 2012). It is important that applicants seek the advice of the authority or independent advice if necessary

2.3 Who cannot register with Coventry Homefinder? - Qualification Criteria

The Localism Act 2011 gave local authorities the power to determine what classes of persons are (or are not) persons *qualifying* to be allocated social housing in their area.

Homeowners will not normally be entitled to an allocation of social housing and therefore would not qualify to register on Coventry Homefinder. In exceptional circumstances, homeowners may register and be awarded priority where this is required (see section 2.12).

Applicants that have been assessed as being guilty of unacceptable behaviour, serious enough to make them 'unsuitable to be a tenant', will not be considered as a qualifying person.

This is defined as behaviour which would, if an applicant or a member of their household was a secure or assured tenant, entitle a landlord to possession in the Courts, under Grounds 1-7 of Schedule 2 of the Housing Act 1985. This can include:

- Owing serious rent arrears.
- Failing to comply with a current or previous tenancy agreement with a Council or Registered Provider.
- Conviction for using a property (or allowing it to be used) for illegal or immoral purposes.
- Legal action taken against them in connection with violence, harassment, racial harassment, threatening behaviour or any other forms of anti-social behaviour.
- Knowingly or recklessly providing false information to obtain a tenancy.

This list is not exhaustive and cases will be considered on an individual basis.

All applicants will be treated as suitable (and therefore qualifying to join the register) at the point of application. The application will be closed if the applicant is subsequently found to be unsuitable to be a tenant. The decision that an applicant does not qualify for an allocation of accommodation may be taken at any point during the life of the application. The decision that an applicant does not qualify to join the register on these grounds will be made by a member of the Coventry Homefinder Team after consideration of available evidence.

Applicants who are assessed as not qualifying under this section of the policy will normally not be allowed to register for a period of 2 years. However, applicants may make a fresh application if there has been a factual change in the applicant's circumstances and/or the applicant can prove a change in their behaviour.

If an applicant is found not to qualify, they will be notified of the decision and the reasons for it in writing and informed of their right to request a review.

There may be instances where an applicant's behaviour is not serious enough to mean that they do not qualify to register, however, their conduct may mean that individual Registered Provider partners would not consider them for a tenancy. This is described in more detail in section 4.7.

2.4 How to Register

Applicants can register by:

- Completing the online application form on the Coventry Homefinder website; www.coventryhomefinder.com
- Completing a paper application form, available from the Housing & Benefits Advice Centre or by contacting the Coventry Homefinder Team.

Online registration is fully automated and applicants are able to access the bidding system as soon as their application is completed. Applicants are automatically placed in Band 3A or 3B

2.5 Requesting Assessment for Priority Banding

Applications made to Coventry Homefinder will always be initially placed in Band 3A or Band 3B through the automated registration process.

If an applicant believes that they or a person in their household has a priority housing need, they must apply directly to Coventry Homefinder to have their housing needs assessed for consideration of priority banding (see section 3 for more detail).

2.6 Keeping your Application Up to Date

It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that their application is kept up to date.

It is important for applicants to ensure that any changes in personal circumstances, household members, contact details or household needs are updated in a timely manner. This ensures that:

- Applicants are able to bid on appropriately sized properties
- Applicants are provided with the correct priority for their household needs
- Housing providers are able to contact applicant quickly to make an offer of accommodation

Applicants do this by logging in to Coventry Homefinder and updating their social housing application, which must be submitted by clicking 'submit' at the end of the application form. These details will then be automatically sent to the Homefinder team to verify the changes.

Vulnerable customers who cannot access the system and do not have any other support available to them can contact the Homefinder Team for assistance to update their details.

2.7 Keeping the Register Up to Date (Annual Renewals)

All applicants are required to review their application each year to ensure that their details are correct and to confirm that they wish to remain on the Coventry Homefinder register.

The annual renewal process takes place on:

1. The first anniversary of their initial application date; and then
2. Subsequently the anniversary of their renewal date each year.

Applicants will receive a notification that their application is due for renewal through the messaging service on their Coventry Homefinder account and by email, if an email address has been provided on their application. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that they respond to the notification and carry out the review. Applicants will have 125 consecutive days to review their application – if this is not completed then their application will be closed.

Only in exceptional circumstances, where the applicant has demonstrated that they have been unable to review their application due to circumstances beyond their control (for example, due to prolonged hospitalisation), will the application be reopened by the Coventry Homefinder Team.

If an application has been closed following the 125 day period and there are no exceptional circumstances, the applicant must make a fresh application. This will result in a new registration date.

Where the Homefinder Team have been informed that the applicant is vulnerable, cannot use the system and does not have any other support available to them, the Homefinder Team will contact the applicant directly using other contact details provided.

IT resources are available in the Housing and Benefits Advice Centre and public Libraries to facilitate this renewal process for applicants who don't have readily available access to computers.

2.8 Cancelling/Closing Applications

An application will be cancelled/closed in the following circumstances:

- If the applicant has requested that the application is cancelled/closed.
- The applicant has not responded to the annual review message (see 2.7).
- If the applicant household has been housed through Coventry Homefinder.
- If the applicant household has been otherwise housed in any suitable social housing for example as a result of a managed move or out of the Coventry area.
- If the applicant household has undertaken a 'mutual exchange' with another social housing tenant.
- If the applicant has refused **5 or more** offers of accommodation, it may be assumed that they no longer require housing through the Coventry Homefinder scheme. The application will be suspended for a period of 28 days, during which time the applicant

can provide reasons for continued refusals. If these are reasonable, the application will be re-opened, if not it will be closed.

- The applicant is found to have provided false information (or withheld relevant information) relating to their housing application.
- The applicant is found to have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour that would make them 'unsuitable to be a tenant' and therefore they do not meet the qualifying criteria for registration (see section 2.3).

2.9 Joint Applications

Two people may make a joint application to Coventry Homefinder if they are eligible and qualify to register.

Where both applicants are under 18 they may not be considered for a registered provider tenancy until the oldest applicant reaches 18 years of age.

Joint applicants are both responsible for the security of their application and must ensure that the log in details and password are kept safe.

2.10 Multiple Applications

A person may only register one application as a main applicant.

In order to prevent duplication of applications the household must provide their National Insurance number to register. Once a National Insurance number is registered on Coventry Homefinder no further registrations can be made for that National Insurance number.

- Applicants will keep the same Coventry Homefinder registration number for life, this is linked to the registered National Insurance number
- If the application is closed (for example, once an applicant is housed) any subsequent applications made under the same applicant's name will have the same registration number.

A person may have their own application whilst also being a household member on another application (for example, a young person aged 16+ may be a household member on their parents application but also have an application in their own right). If this young person is subsequently housed independently, they will be removed from the application where they are a household member.

2.11 Applications from employees linked to Coventry Homefinder

Applications can be accepted from Coventry City Council employees connected to Coventry Homefinder, employees of Partner Registered Providers connected to Coventry Homefinder, elected members, board members and their close relatives, provided they are eligible to apply and meet the qualifying criteria. Applicants must disclose any such relationship at the

time of application and/or at the time that an offer of accommodation is made. Any application for priority for employees linked to Coventry Homefinder must be verified by the Housing Options Service Manager or the Head of Housing.

The allocation of accommodation to an employee linked to Coventry Homefinder as part of their work is a decision to be made by the Partner Registered Provider and will be based on the shortlisting criteria, the shortlisted position and any relevant tenancy checks that the Registered Provider would normally carry out.

2.12 Home Owners

Homeowners will not normally be entitled to an allocation of social housing. In exceptional circumstances, Coventry Homefinder may assess that priority preference is required for Homeowners; this might include:

- Serious medical issues where the present housing is impacting on the health needs and it is not possible to undertake adaptations to meet the needs of the household.
- Statutory overcrowding as defined in Part X of the Housing Act 1985.
- Other exceptional situations may be considered based on individual circumstances.

The *Allocation of Accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England (2012)* states in section 3.23:

“The Government believes that authorities should avoid allocating social housing to people who already own their own homes. Where they do so, this should only be in exceptional circumstances; for example, for elderly owner occupiers who cannot stay in their own home and need to move into sheltered accommodation.”

Registered Providers may consider an allocation of social housing in these circumstances, providing that the home owner undertakes to sell the property within 12 months of allocation. Social housing will only be allocated as an applicant’s ‘only and principal home’. Where it is found that a social housing tenant is renting out a property they own, the Registered Provider may take steps to end the social housing tenancy.

In cases where the applicant is a homeowner with no housing need as described above, the Registered Provider will not offer the property and the bid will be ‘skipped’ (see section 4.7)

For the purposes of this policy, “home owners” are defined as:

- Owner Occupiers
- Persons who own a property either jointly or outright, even if they do not presently live in the property, where they have (or could gain) a legal right to occupy that property (for example, if they own a property that is rented out to others).

2.13 Assistance for those that cannot use the system

Coventry Homefinder aims to ensure equal access to all and has developed a number of ways by which those who are unable to use the system themselves and don't have support otherwise available to them, are not disadvantaged.

This includes:

- Sending details of vacant properties to people who are unable to access the property adverts through the online Homefinder system.
- Contacting applicants when there is a property being advertised that matches their specific requirements.
- Placing bids for vulnerable households based on pre-agreed criteria of location and property type.

To access this support applicants or their advocates (with written approval to represent them) should contact the Homefinder Team on 024 76 834024 or by emailing coventryhomefinder@coventry.gov.uk to discuss what assistance can be provided.

2.14 Deliberately giving false information

It is a criminal offence for an applicant to try to obtain social housing accommodation by knowingly or recklessly providing false information or withholding information relating to their housing application.

An applicant who has deliberately withheld or misrepresented any information which would be relevant to the assessment of his or her housing circumstances and their priority banding on the register, will be considered to have been guilty of such behaviour and may be assessed as being unsuitable to qualify for an allocation (see section 2.3).

Registered Providers may seek possession of a tenancy that was granted as a result of a false statement and may also attempt to recover any costs incurred.

Following investigation, if an applicant is found to have knowingly provided false information or withheld information and is consequently removed from the register, they will be notified of the decision and the reasons for it in writing and informed of their right to request a review.

2.15 Notification of decisions and a right to review

Applicants will be advised in writing if their application has been refused or closed due to not meeting the eligibility or qualifying criteria, and informed of their right to request a review of the decision. More information on reviews is available in section 5.1.

Section 3 – How your Application is assessed

3.1 Local Connection

All applicants that are eligible and that meet the qualifying criteria can register, regardless of local connection. However, applicants without a local connection will be placed in a lower priority band.

Applicants can demonstrate a local connection if:

- They have lived within the Coventry local authority area for 6 out of the last 12 months or 3 out of the last 5 years (such time periods being continuous in each case).
- Their regular place of work is within the Coventry local authority area (not including casual or seasonal work with daily pay rather than contracted work).
- They have close family connections with someone currently living in the Coventry local authority area and who has lived within the local authority area for 6 out of the last 12 months or 3 out of the last 5 years (such time periods being continuous in each case). This includes parents, siblings and children.

3.2 Property size and household size

When assessing the size of property that a household will be eligible for, Coventry Homefinder will use the Bedroom Standard.

The Coventry Homefinder Policy will allocate a separate bedroom to:

- Each married or cohabiting couple (including civil partners).
- Each adult aged 21 years or more, not in a couple.
- Any two children/adolescents of the same sex under 21.
- Any two children of opposite sex under 10.
- Any other child who cannot be paired with another as above.
- A carer who does not live as part of the household but provides the applicant or a member of the household with overnight care on four or more nights per week.

Access to children:

Where a parent does not provide the principal home of a child or children (under 18), but has access arrangements which include overnight stays on three or more nights per week ('staying access'), they will be eligible to bid for a property with one additional bedroom.

If an applicant has a shared residence order, they may not automatically be entitled to bedrooms for their children. Coventry Homefinder will adopt the principle that the children need one home of an adequate size. If one home already provides adequate accommodation, the application is treated as if the person has 'staying access' to the children (as above).

The applicant must provide verification of the shared residence or custody of the children.

Applicants that require assistance with housing costs through Housing Benefit must ensure that they are aware of the size criteria applied during the housing benefit assessment before they place bids for properties that allow for an additional bedroom. Applicants must be able to show, through an affordability assessment, that they are able to cover the full rental costs of the property. If they cannot, the Registered Provider may not make an offer of accommodation for the property.

3.3 Registration Date/Effective Band Date

All applications will be given an effective date which reflects the time that they have been registered and the time they have been experiencing a housing need recognised under the banding priorities.

This date will be used when shortlisting to determine how long the applicant has been assessed as requiring priority in the band and/or has been registered with Coventry Homefinder.

- For applicants with a housing need recognised in Bands 1A to 2C – the effective date will be the date that the priority band was applied for.
- For applicants placed in Bands 3A or 3B – the effective date will be the date of registration.
- Any time which elapses whilst the applicant is deemed not to be a qualifying person due to their behaviour making them unsuitable to be a tenant, or has had their application closed due to refusal of offers, will not count towards their eligible date and the date will be adjusted accordingly.

When applicants move to a different band due to a change in their circumstances, the following will apply:

- Moving to a higher band: the effective date will be the date that the higher band priority was applied for.
- Moving to a lower band, within the housing needs priority Bands 1A – 2C: the effective date will be the earliest date that a priority need band was applied for.
- Moving to Band 3A or 3B: the effective date will be the original date of registration.

3.4 Reasonable Preference

This Policy must ensure that reasonable preference is given to the following categories of people, under Section 166A(3) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended):

- People who are homeless within the meaning of Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (including those who are intentionally homeless and those not in priority need).
- People who are owed a duty under section 190(2), 193(2) or 195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any housing authority under section 192(3).
- People occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions.
- People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds related to a disability.
- People who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the housing authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or others).

The Policy is framed so as to give reasonable preference to applicants who fall into these categories, over those who do not, through a priority banding system. This is described below.

3.5 How Priority Is Given – Summary Table of Bands

Coventry Homefinder uses a banding system to provide priority for applicants who fall into the reasonable preference categories listed in Section 3.4.

Coventry Homefinder has 7 bands that reflect the extent of housing need experienced by the household. The table below shows the different levels of need that are recognised in this policy.

Level of Need	Homefinder Band	Housing Need Category
Exceptional need	1A	Statutorily Homeless (including National Witness Mobility Scheme)
		Exceptional housing needs due to health difficulties
		Severe Overcrowding – require an additional 2 or more bedrooms
		Tenants of partner housing providers who need to move to enable a redevelopment scheme to go ahead
		Tenants of partner housing providers who are under-occupying a property by 3 or more bedrooms
	1B	Tenants of partner housing providers who are moving to release specialist disabled persons accommodation
		People fleeing violence, harassment or abuse
		Tenants of partner housing providers who are under-occupying a property by 2 bedrooms
		People with an urgent medical need who are also overcrowded
		Extreme Unsanitary conditions causing severe health and safety hazards in the household
Urgent need	2A	Urgent housing needs due to health difficulties
		Short term hostel dwellers
		Housing needs arising from Social and Welfare issues
		Overcrowding – require an additional 1 bedroom
		Housing needs as a result of being a “Looked After Child”.
		Unsanitary/unsuitable conditions affecting the health of the household or causing health and safety hazards
		Tenants of partner housing providers who are under-occupying by one bedroom
		Review of Band 1A applicants
Non-Urgent need	2B	Low level housing needs due to health difficulties
		Households who need to move to a particular locality, where failure to achieve this would cause hardship to themselves or to others.
		Homelessness Prevention
		Review of Band 1B applicants
	2C	Intentionally Homeless Households
		Homeless households who do not have a priority need
No priority need	3A	No housing need with a local connection
		Housing need but no local connection
	3B	No housing need with no local connection

3.6 Requesting Priority Band Assessment (detail)

Applications made to Coventry Homefinder will initially be placed in Band 3A or Band 3B through the automated registration process. **If an applicant believes that they or a person in their household has a housing need they will need to apply directly to Coventry Homefinder to have their needs assessed for consideration of priority preference.**

Priority is only awarded when the current property is having an impact on the household needs, not where a household member has a particular need but the housing remains adequate.

Applicants will be assessed for priority banding only when a request is made which details the housing need experienced by the household. Applicants should provide the evidence required as shown in the table below:

Type of housing need	Information to be provided
Housing need due to health difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical Assessment Form – (found on the Homefinder website – link to be inserted upon finalisation) • Address History form - (found on the Homefinder website)
Overcrowding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcrowding priority information details - (found on the Homefinder website – link to be inserted upon finalisation) • Address History form - (found on the Homefinder website– link to be inserted upon finalisation)
Redevelopment or refurbishment of social housing property	Supporting confirmation from the Registered Provider (current landlord)
Tenants of social housing property releasing specialist disabled persons accommodation	Supporting confirmation from the Registered Provider (current landlord)
Fleeing Violence or Harassment	Supporting confirmation from landlord, police and/or other support agencies
Short term hostel dwellers	Referral template provided through the hostel support agency
Under-occupation of existing social housing property	Supporting confirmation from the Registered Provider (current landlord)
Unsanitary conditions	Supporting request from Coventry City Council Housing Enforcement service following inspection

Type of housing need	Information to be provided
Housing need as a result of being a “looked after child”	Referral template provided through the aftercare/leaving care agency
Social and Welfare Priority	Social and Welfare Assessment Form – (found on the homefinder website – link to be inserted upon finalisation) or Through specific support services working with the customer

The requests for priority received will be considered against this policy framework. Where additional information is required to provide a full understanding of the applicants’ situation, this will be requested and may include contacting other agencies that the Council considers appropriate, such as:

- support agencies
- health care professionals
- the existing or previous landlords
- enforcement agencies including the police, council enforcement teams
- other Council departments
- other Local Authorities

3.7 Verification of information

The final part of the assessment process is to ensure verification documents have been received. These will then be scanned onto the applicants’ electronic file on Coventry Homefinder which will be retained in line with the Data Protection Act 1998. The Verification documents requested may include (where relevant):

- Proof of income/benefits ie. Wage slip or Bank statement
- Proof of current address
- Address history for the last 5 years
- Proof of receipt of child benefit
- Passport or other form of identification for all household members
- Copy of current tenancy agreement
- Letter from current Landlord to confirm the size of the property

3.8 Review of Priority

Applicants who have been awarded Band 1A or 1B will have their application reviewed after 6 months of their effective date. If the housing needs of the applicant’s household have changed, they will be placed in the relevant band for their current situation. If the applicant has not bid on suitable properties that have been advertised their band will change to either Band 2A or 2B respectively.

Applicants who have been awarded Band 2A, 2B or 2C will have their priority re-assessed at the annual review verification process. If the housing needs of the applicant's household have changed, they will be placed in the relevant band for their current situation.

Banding priorities may also be reviewed if the applicant informs Homefinder of changes to their circumstances that affect the housing needs of the household.

3.9 Further Information on Priority Housing Needs

The following sections provide greater detail and clarification of the priorities that can be awarded through Coventry Homefinder

3.10 Homelessness

Homelessness is assessed under the provisions of Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). Homelessness is represented in this policy at different levels depending upon the assessed need of the household. This includes:

1. Statutorily Homeless Households – Applicants assessed by Coventry City Council as statutorily homeless will be made one offer of suitable accommodation. Within the Coventry Homefinder system applicants will receive Band 1A priority, however bids for available properties will be made by the Housing Assessment Officer responsible for the applicant's case.

Applicants who are supported through the National Witness Mobility Scheme will also be provided with this priority and their support worker from the scheme will bid on their behalf. This process will be a closely managed, confidential situation between the scheme and the Housing Options Service Manager.

2. Homelessness Prevention – Applicants who have been prevented from becoming homeless through the Housing Assessment service, by negotiation with the present landlord, enabling them to remain in their tenancy for a minimum period of 6 months; or applicants who have accepted a fixed term tenancy through the Access to Private Rented Properties Scheme as homelessness prevention; or applicants who are required to leave tied accommodation due to the end of their employment (unless employment has been terminated due to disciplinary action or the applicant is required to leave the accommodation due to arrears or other breach of tenancy or licence conditions); or applicants who are living in excluded tenancies - sharing a property with an unrelated landlord e.g. lodgers who share facilities with the main home occupier
3. Homeless Households who do not have a priority need – Applicants who are assessed by the Housing Assessment Officers as being eligible and homeless but who do not have a priority need under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996.

4. Intentionally Homeless Households – Applicants who have been assessed by the Housing Assessment Officers as having, by reason of act or omission, caused the homelessness intentionally.
5. Households who have refused a suitable offer of accommodation resulting in the Authority discharging the main homeless duty.

More detail about the homelessness assessment process and how the Authority can discharge its duty towards homeless households is provided in Appendix 1

3.11 Overcrowding

Applicants who request priority because they believe that they are overcrowded are assessed against the bedroom standard (see section 3.2).

There are two levels of overcrowding priority:

- Households who are in need of an additional 2 or more bedrooms
- Households who are in need of 1 additional bedroom

In assessing this priority Coventry Homefinder will consider:

- The number of bedrooms in the property
- The number of people in the household, including ages and genders of household members to determine sharing arrangements.
- The length of time that the household have been overcrowded – applicants must have lived in the property for a minimum of 6 months before this priority can be assessed.
- Single person households (over 18) will only be considered for this priority if:
 - They are living with family and their sleeping arrangements are creating overcrowded circumstances.
 - By having their own Coventry Homefinder application and gaining their own tenancy they would alleviate the overcrowding in the family home.
- Applicants requesting an assessment where a household member is pregnant will need to provide the relevant documents confirming pregnancy in order to be considered for a larger property, if this is required. Once this is verified the number of bedrooms required will be amended on the application. Only when the baby is born can the applicant then request priority for overcrowding based on the bedroom standards.

Coventry Homefinder will require an address history for the last 5 years and verification from the present landlord regarding the number of bedrooms in the property to award overcrowding priority.

3.12 Housing Need due to health difficulties

The assessment of priority due to health difficulties is not based on the seriousness of the applicant's condition but it is solely based on the seriousness of the impact that their current type and location of the housing is having on that condition and whether this would improve significantly through a move to alternative accommodation.

Assessments for priority due to medical need will normally relate to the physical circumstances in the property but location can be considered, for example where medical evidence has shown that the environment in general is having an impact on the mental health of the applicant.

To ensure assessments are accurate and resources are fully considered an assessment of the present accommodation by an Occupational Therapist or other health professional will be required for all applicants before priority is considered. It may be more appropriate to consider the provision of aids and adaptations for the applicant to remain in their current property instead of moving to other accommodation. Priority will not be awarded if it is reasonable to provide aids and adaptations. Priority will be awarded if aids and adaptations cannot be provided.

Priority due to medical need is represented at 3 levels in this policy:

1. Exceptional housing need due to health difficulties – where the applicant or a household member has very severe health needs that are seriously affected by their current type of accommodation making the accommodation completely unsuitable.

For example, if an applicant is unable to be discharged from hospital or a care environment as their current property has become unsuitable due to their immediate medical needs.

This priority will also be considered for applicants who are subject to legal conditions relating to health treatments and where the present accommodation cannot meet these conditions (for example, Community Treatment Orders under the Mental Health Act 2007). Supporting Information from relevant health care professionals must be provided.

Coventry Homefinder would expect that customers with this level of need would normally be in receipt of disability related benefits.

2. Urgent housing need due to health difficulties – where the applicant or household member occupies accommodation that is unsuitable due to severe health needs and the housing conditions are having a major adverse effect on the health condition.

For example, this might refer to being unable to access the kitchen or bathroom and adaptations cannot be provided; this also might refer to applicants who suffer with severe mental health conditions that are exacerbated by perceptions of threats, noise or isolation in the general environment/location that they are living in.

Coventry Homefinder would expect that customers with this level of need would normally be in receipt of disability related benefits.

3. Low level housing need due to health difficulties – where the applicant or household member occupies accommodation that makes it difficult but not impossible to make full use of the current accommodation.

For example access to the property may require negotiating some steps that the applicant finds difficult but once over this threshold they are able to access all other elements of the accommodation; this may also refer to customers who have some mental health difficulties where the general environment/location that they are living in is having some impact on the treatment and daily management of their health.

Applicants who have a medical need will be required to complete a medical form and an address history form. Supporting documents from hospital consultants, family doctors, specialist nurses and other health care professionals, should be provided to support the application.

Medical priority will not be awarded when an applicant gives up accommodation voluntarily, that was suitable for their health condition and then seeks priority re-housing because of the same health condition, unless they have lived in the property for a period of 6 months (see section 3.26).

3.13 Social and Welfare Priority

There are some circumstances where the provision of alternative accommodation is required due to the social and welfare needs of the household. These cases will all be assessed according to their own individual circumstances and priority will be considered based on the impact of the present housing on the needs of the household members.

Examples of Social and Welfare priority include:

- Applicants who require significant support (daily care) from a relative and a move will help them to receive that support. The applicant will be required to ensure that they seek properties within 1 mile of the person providing the support and this person must demonstrate that travel around Coventry is a serious problem for them. A letter from the relative is required to demonstrate the support that they are providing and will continue to provide in the alternative property. Confirmation will be required from the appropriate Coventry City Council social care service that they support the request.
- Similarly the Applicant can be the supporting relative providing the care as detailed above and a move closer to the person receiving the support is necessary. The applicant will be required to ensure that they seek properties within 1 mile of the person receiving

the support and to demonstrate that travel around Coventry is a serious problem for them. A letter from the relative is required to demonstrate the support that they are providing and will continue to provide in the alternative property. Confirmation will be required from the appropriate Coventry City Council social care service that they support the request.

- Applicants who require alternative accommodation to carry out child caring responsibilities supported by Coventry City Council. This might include approved foster carers; family members who have been approved as appropriate carers for children who might otherwise be required to be 'looked after' by the Local Authority.
- Applicants who have experienced a level of abuse in a specific area and need to relocate in order to overcome this due to the lasting psychological impact of remaining in the home or area in which the abuse took place. This differentiates from priority for reasons of violence and harassment as the perpetrator no longer presents a physical risk to the applicant.

3.14 Hardship

This priority can include applicants who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the housing authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or others).

For example, this might include the need to move to undertake a prolonged period of education or training, where this is linked to employment and failure to undertake the training would lead to the loss of employment.

3.15 Unsanitary/Unsuitable Property

An Unsanitary/Unsuitable Property is defined as a property which has one or more of the following:

- Lacks essential facilities
- Is detrimental or hazardous
- Poses a serious risk to the health and safety of the applicant or members of the household

In all cases the property would need to be assessed by the Coventry City Council Environment and Housing Enforcement Service and priority will only be given if action that they have taken has been unable to resolve the situation.

This priority is represented in 2 levels in this policy:

1. Extreme Unsanitary/unsuitable conditions causing severe health and safety hazards in the household

This would include properties subject to closing or demolition orders or dangerous, ruinous or dilapidated buildings, as identified by the Council.

2. Unsanitary/unsuitable conditions affecting the health of the household or causing health and safety hazards

This might include:

- Lacking cold or hot water supplies, electricity, gas or adequate heating
- Lacking inside WC
- Property in serious disrepair
- Households with dependent children who are sharing living room/ kitchen/ bathroom/ WC with other unrelated households
- Lacking bathroom or kitchen facilities

3.16 Specific Priorities for Tenants of Partner Registered Providers – Under-occupation of properties

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 initiated a number of changes to the way benefits were paid. One of these is the reduction of housing benefit to households in social housing who are under-occupying their present tenancies. In addition to this the demand for larger properties in Coventry is high and Coventry Homefinder would encourage households to consider the size of property that they require. However, households will not be able to bid on properties that are too small for the number of people in their household.

To support households to live in appropriately sized accommodation, tenants of partner housing providers, who currently live in Coventry, will be able to apply for under-occupation priority. Coventry Homefinder will confirm the number of bedrooms a tenant is occupying with the housing provider and award the appropriate priority. The number of bedrooms required will be assessed using the bedroom standard (see section 3.2).

There are 3 levels of priority for under-occupation of a registered housing provider tenancy that can be found in the table in section 3.5.

3.17 Specific Priorities for Tenants of Partner Registered Providers – Tenants of Partner Registered Provider who need to move to enable a redevelopment scheme to go ahead

Applicants who live in Coventry and are required to move by a partner registered provider to enable the redevelopment or refurbishment of housing and the surrounding area will be awarded this priority when the registered provider makes representation to Coventry Homefinder.

3.18 Specific Priorities for Tenants of Partner Registered Providers – Tenants of Partner Registered Providers who are moving to release specialist disabled person's accommodation

Applicants who are occupying purpose built or adapted social housing accommodation that makes it particularly suitable for occupation by a disabled person and that is located in Coventry, but where household no longer needs such accommodation. Applicants will be awarded this priority following confirmation from the housing provider.

3.19 Other Priorities - People fleeing violence, harassment or abuse

This priority will be awarded where the household is experiencing violence, harassment or abuse and is able to provide supporting and substantial evidence through the landlord, police and other support agencies to demonstrate that the issues cannot be resolved and there is an urgent need for rehousing.

In addition, existing Registered Provider tenants will need to provide a completed risk assessment from the Landlord and provide substantial information relating to the actions that have been taken by the landlord and details of why the situation cannot be resolved.

3.20 Other Priorities - Short term hostel dwellers

Applicants who are living in short term accommodation (less than 6 months tenure or have been in specialist hostel accommodation and are assessed as being ready to move on to independent accommodation within the next 6 months) in a scheme that has been identified by the Council as contributing towards the objectives of the Coventry Housing & Homelessness Strategy. Such schemes must provide supported accommodation, with active support from the managing agent to assist with issues impacting on the service user including: benefit support, health issues; employment and training opportunities; budgeting and move on assistance to access settled accommodation in either the private rented or social housing sector.

This priority will only be awarded to households if they are accessing accommodation in such a scheme and have a local connection to Coventry. Applicants that are living in single person's hostel accommodation will only receive priority for the single household member living in the hostel accommodation. Applicants in hostels do not qualify for overcrowding priority.

If it is found that the applicant has left suitable accommodation to move into a hostel this priority will not be awarded.

3.21 Other Priorities - Housing need as a result of being a “looked after child”

Applicants who are “looked after” by the authority, where Coventry City Council children’s services are supporting the request for housing and providing a package of support to assist in sustaining future tenancies. This priority will be awarded when the young person is not already adequately or suitably accommodated.

This priority will only be awarded to house the applicant for the first time and not for any subsequent moves that they may wish to make.

Applications can be made for this priority when the young person reaches 17 years and 6 months old. Once the application is assessed and priority has been agreed the effective date of the application will be back dated to the applicants 16th birthday. This priority no longer applies once the applicant has reached 25 years of age.

3.23 Band 3A and 3B definitions

The allocation of social housing will be entirely prioritised to customers who have an assessed housing need within this Policy. Applicants in band 3A or 3B will only be considered for a property they have bid on after all other applicants who have an assessed priority need and have also bid for that property (see section 4.6).

No housing need with local connection (3A)

Applicants who have a local connection to Coventry as described in section 3.1, but have no housing need as recognised in the priorities for bands 1A – 2C.

Housing need but no local connection (3A)

Applicants who have a housing need detailed in the priorities for bands 1A – 2C but have no local connection as described in section 3.1.

No housing need, No local connection (3B)

Applicants who have no housing need detailed in the priorities for bands 1A – 2C and have no local connection as described in section 3.1

3.24 Further Information – Armed Forces

Additional preference must be given to an applicant that has an urgent housing need (under the reasonable preference categories) **and** who:

- Is a former member of the armed forces, or
- Is serving in the armed forces and is suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability as a result of the person’s service, or

- Is a bereaved spouse or civil partner of a member of the armed forces who is leaving services family accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner in service, or
- Serving or former members of the reserve forces suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability as a result of their service.

If an applicant requests additional priority on these grounds, following assessment they will be placed in one band above the band that they would have been placed in had their application been based on reasonable preference housing needs alone. This will award them additional preference over others with the same urgent housing needs and meet the provisions set out in The Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012.

Applicants that meet the above criteria that have an exceptional housing need that would place them in Band 1A will remain in Band 1A, as this is the highest priority that they can receive, however the effective date will be adjusted to give 1 additional year of priority.

(Example: an applicant is a former member of the armed forces whose household is overcrowded and needs one additional bedroom. The household would ordinarily be placed in Band 2A due to overcrowding, but will be placed in the band above - Band 1B - due to their overcrowding **and** the fact that they were formerly serving in the armed forces).

Applicants with no reasonable preference housing need that would otherwise result in them being placed in Bands 1A to 2C will be placed in Band 3A or 3B on the same criteria as other applicants.

Local housing authorities are also required to frame their policies so that local connection is not taken into regard when deciding whether someone is a qualifying person (is able to join the register) if they are a member or former member of the Armed Forces (and certain family members under certain circumstances). The Coventry Homefinder Policy does not restrict any applicants' ability to register (to 'qualify') based on local connection, and as such it complies with these provisions in The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012.

3.25 Exceptional Circumstances

For some customers, there may be exceptional circumstances that create housing needs which are not recognised in the Coventry Homefinder Policy. In these circumstances a panel from the Partnership Board, consisting of senior officers from the Council and Partner Housing Providers, will consider the individual case and make an award of priority banding outside of the normal categories if it is determined that this is required.

The arrangements with respect to exceptional circumstances are not intended to form a second review process. Where a case has already been reviewed it cannot, at a later stage, be brought to the Partnership Board panel for further consideration.

The Choice Based Lettings Officer will be required to take the case to the Partnership Board panel to present the needs of the household and the reasons why exceptional circumstances need to be considered.

Exceptional circumstances may also include the requirement for existing housing stock to be amended or altered to facilitate the needs of the household. This may have specific resource implications.

3.26 *Deliberately worsening circumstances*

Applicants that have requested priority need assessments must provide an address history. Priority banding will not normally be awarded when an applicant has given up accommodation that was suitable for their needs, but then seeks priority re-housing because of those needs.

The request for reasonable priority preference in this case will only be considered when the applicant and their household have lived in the property for a minimum of 6 months.

For example, if the household has become overcrowded due to moving into their current property, from a previous property that was available and reasonable for them to continue to occupy without being overcrowded, this priority will not be awarded for a period of 6 months from the day that they moved in to the current property.

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Section 4 – The Choice Based Letting Scheme

4.1 The Choice Based Lettings Model

A choice based lettings scheme allows applicants to express an interest in available properties, which are advertised each week. Expressing an interest in a property is known as 'bidding' or 'placing a bid'.

At the end of the bidding period, those applicants that have expressed an interest in a property are shortlisted in line with this Policy. These processes are explained in more detail in this section.

4.2 The Bidding Cycle

The bidding cycle runs from midnight (00.00am) on Thursday morning to 11.59pm on the following Tuesday night, each week (with the exception of the Christmas period when the bidding cycle usually runs for two weeks).

Properties are not advertised on Wednesday and bids cannot be placed on a Wednesday.

4.3 How properties are advertised

Available properties are advertised on the Coventry Homefinder website during each bidding cycle. A property list is also available each week from the Housing & Benefits Advice Centre and partner Registered Provider offices. Copies are also available from Libraries on request.

Vulnerable customers who cannot access the system and do not have any other support available to them can contact the Coventry Homefinder Team for assistance (see section 2.13).

4.4 How properties are labelled

Each of the partner Registered Providers has responsibility for preparing the property description and advertising their vacancies on Coventry Homefinder.

Adverts will be clearly labelled to show the main property features, and the types of households that are eligible to bid for the property. A photograph will normally be included with the advert.

All properties advertised will include details of:

- The landlord of the property.
- The location of the property (including the street name, area and a location map).

- The type of property (house, flat etc).
- The number of bedrooms that the property has and the maximum number of occupants.
- The rent amount and any other relevant charges.
- The types of households that can bid for the property (for example, any age restrictions).
- Whether priority will be given to specific groups such as current social tenants.
- Tenancy type (Starter tenancy, Assured, Fixed Term)
- The mobility assessment category of the property and details of any specific adaptations that have been made to the property.

Applicants must consider all of these factors carefully when deciding whether to express an interest in (bid on) a property.

4.5 How to Place a Bid

Applicants must express an interest in a property by placing a 'bid' in order to be shortlisted and considered for an allocation of that property.

Applicants may express an interest ('bid') on up to three properties in each bidding period.

In order to express an interest in a property that is being advertised, the applicant can use one of several methods:

- Online bidding – applicants can log on and see which properties they are eligible to bid on. Bids can then be placed by following the on screen instructions.
- Telephone bidding – bids can be placed by telephone by calling 0845 270 1274. Applicants will need their registration number, password and the reference number/s of the properties they wish to bid for.
- Assisted bidding – where an applicant has given consent, bids may be placed on behalf of an applicant by a support agency. Vulnerable applicants who cannot access the system themselves and have no other support available to them, can also request that bids are placed on suitable properties by the Coventry Homefinder Team. Applicants should contact the Team to request this service.

Applicants can withdraw a bid at any point during the bidding period and may then place that bid on an alternative property.

4.6 How Applicants are Shortlisted

At the end of each bidding period, expressions of interest for a property (bids) are shortlisted in the following way:

- Expressions of interest (bids) for properties will be placed in the order of priority band – Band 1A highest priority, then Band 1B, Band 2A etc.
- If two or more applicants from the same band have expressed an interest for the same property, the 'effective date' that they entered their current band will be used to determine the higher priority (see section 3.3). The applicant with the earliest effective date will be shortlisted first.
- If two or more applicants with the same band and the same effective date have expressed an interest in a property, the date of original registration will be used.

Registered Providers may advertise up to 10% of their available properties with priority given to their own current tenants. This will mean that the shortlist is arranged as described above, but they may prioritise their own tenants above other applicants within the shortlist.

There may be occasions that Registered Providers do not offer properties to the highest shortlisted applicant, for example if they do not meet local lettings criteria. Any local lettings criteria will be explained in the property advert.

Properties that have been adapted for people with disabilities may be allocated based on the 'best fit' of requirements of bidders rather than in shortlist order – this is described in more detail in section 4.8.

Please note:

- Expressions of interest are shortlisted at the **end** of the bidding period based on priority banding and the effective/registration date of all applicants that have expressed an interest. There is no advantage to placing bids early in the bidding period.
- When applicants express an interest in a property, they are informed of their current position in the shortlist. However, as more people place bids throughout the bidding period, this position may change. Applicants are advised to check their bid positions near to the end of the bidding period, in order to make best use of their bids.

4.7 Bids that may be overlooked (Skipping)

Applicants who are assessed as being 'unsuitable to be a tenant' may not qualify to register with Coventry Homefinder (see section 2.3). However, there are circumstances where a Registered Provider may not offer a property to an applicant who is shortlisted, even if their behaviour is not serious enough to mean that they do not qualify to be registered. This is known as 'skipping' the bid. Each Provider has their own detailed criteria/policy for offering a tenancy, but common reasons why an applicant's bid may be overlooked include:

- The applicant has a current tenancy, or has had a previous tenancy with a Registered Provider or Local Authority, and has a housing debt outstanding to that organisation. This can include rent arrears, rechargeable repairs and court costs.

- The applicant has committed acts of anti-social behaviour or has allowed members of the household or visitors to their home to commit acts of anti-social behaviour, and legal action has taken place as a result.
- The applicant is a current tenant of a Registered Provider or Local Authority and the maintenance or decorative condition of the property has been assessed as not meeting their obligations in the Conditions of Tenancy.
- The applicant or a member of their household has assaulted or harassed an employee or agent of one of the partner Registered Providers or Coventry City Council.
- The applicant cannot demonstrate that they can afford to pay the rent. Consideration will be given to the welfare benefits that may be paid to the applicant.
- The applicant or their household do not meet local lettings criteria.
- The advert specified that priority will be given to current tenants of that Registered Provider, and the applicant is not currently a tenant of that organisation.
- The property is specialist or has been adapted and the applicant does not require these adaptations.
- The applicant requires specific adaptations that cannot reasonably be provided in that property.

In the first instance, Registered Providers will notify the applicant in writing when a bid has been skipped, and the reasons for the bid being skipped. This will include details of how the applicant can resolve any issues to prevent further skipped bids (if possible).

Applicants may then continue to be skipped until they can demonstrate that the reason for skipping has been resolved (for example, if the applicant has been skipped due to rent arrears, they may have to demonstrate that the arrears have been paid off or a re-payment plan has been adhered to for a certain period of time).

The decision to overlook a shortlisted bid is taken by the partner Registered Provider and it is the individual criteria/policy for each Provider that will be applied in all cases of allocating a property or skipping a bid. Appeals against a decision to skip a bid should be addressed to the Registered Provider that made the decision.

4.8 Adapted properties

Accommodation for households that need specific adaptations is in high demand with limited supply available. In order to make the best use of available accommodation that is either a purpose built disabled persons property or has substantial adaptations installed, a separate allocation process will be used:

- Applicants with needs requiring adapted properties must have an assessment from an occupational therapist to determine the type of property or adaptations required; this information will then be compiled to a common 'register'. The register will include the following information:
 - Applicant name; registration number; priority band; effective date
 - Applicants specific housing need
 - Specific location required
 - Restrictions in the location – e.g ground floor
 - Description of the type of property required
 - Specific adaptations required
- Initially, all property that becomes available that is purpose built or adapted will not be advertised through Coventry Homefinder; instead the property details will be matched against the housing needs of those customers assessed as requiring this type of accommodation to ensure a 'best fit' of the applicants needs to the property resources.
- As the property matched is on a 'best fit' basis this may mean that offers made are not prioritised in order of priority band or effective date.
- If a property is not let through this process, it will be advertised on Coventry Homefinder in the usual way but may be listed as a 'general needs' (Category 6) property. The exception to this will be purpose built disabled persons properties (Category 1), that must always be allocated to those in need of this type of accommodation.
- Properties that are adapted will be available in the first instance only to those that have been assessed as requiring adaptations. However, applicants that require adaptations will be able to bid on all properties and if they are shortlisted, the landlord will consider whether it is reasonable to provide adaptations in the property to ensure that it is suitable for the households needs.

Properties are categorised as below:

Mobility Assessment Category	Category description	Applicants assessed as being eligible for these categories
Category 1 Purpose built wheelchair housing	Disabled persons Bungalow, flat or house which has been adapted to be fully wheelchair accessible on the ground floor.	People with severe disability who are unable to stand or walk unassisted i.e. people who need to use a wheelchair both indoors and outdoors

Mobility Assessment Category	Category description	Applicants assessed as being eligible for these categories
Category 2 Partly Adapted House	House with a through floor lift or stair lift Access to the property will be level, ramped or step lift Other adaptations may include changes to bathroom/ kitchen	People who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may be a wheelchair user outdoors or use walking aids • are not able to climb stairs and need a through floor lift or stair lift • require assistance to access bathrooms/kitchen • have dependent children (under 16) in the household
Category 3 Partly Adapted Flats	Flats with level access into the property and with some adaptation(s) This would include adapted flats in high rise blocks which have a communal lift	People who do not use a wheelchair indoors but have mobility needs and cannot climb stairs or steps.
Category 4 Ground floor accommodation	Ground floor flats Bungalows	Flats - People who have a mobility needs or other health concerns and need accommodation on the ground floor Bungalows - People over the age of 55 who are applying to live on the ground floor
Category 5	Above ground floor flats and maisonettes	Any household that does not have specific need as detailed in category 1-4 Applicants with access to children but who do not live with them on a permanent basis
Category 6	General Housing – All other general housing stock	Any household that does not have specific needs as detailed in categories 1-4

4.9 Viewing Properties and Receiving Offers

All applicants, other than those assessed as statutorily homeless and waiting for an offer to discharge the main housing duty (see Appendix 1 for details of offers for these applicants), will be contacted by the Landlord if they are successful in bidding for a property.

The Housing provider will arrange for the successful bidder to view the property at a jointly agreed time. If the Housing provider is unable to contact the successful bidder they may be skipped and a viewing will then be arranged with the next successful bidder in the shortlist. It is therefore important that the applicant ensures that all contact details on their application are kept up to date (see section 2.6).

Following the viewing, offers will be made based on the pre-tenancy checks in the individual allocation policies of the Registered Providers. Tenancy checks may include:

- an assessment of household income to ensure that the tenancy can be afforded;
- provision of documents confirming the identity of the household members
- Police checks if a declaration of conviction or antisocial behaviour has been made

Once these checks have been completed and both parties are happy to continue with the offer of a property, the Housing Provider will arrange for the applicant to sign a tenancy agreement, at which point the keys to the property will be provided.

Multi-Views

Some Housing Providers will arrange a multi-view for a property. A multi-view is a single viewing but a range of applicants in the top bidding positions will be invited to view the property.

The offer of the property will still be made first to the applicants in order of their bidding positions, however it serves to confirm those who are genuinely interested and will make the process quicker in letting the property.

4.10 Multiple Refusals

Applicants who refuse 5 or more offers made to them following successful bids may have their application suspended and will be informed of this in writing. The applicant will be required to contact Coventry Homefinder within 28 days to show that the refusals were reasonable in order for their application to be reopened. If they do not, the application will be closed.

Coventry Homefinder will consider the individual circumstances of each case.

Not responding to contacts made regarding the offer of a property, failing to attend a viewing or refusing a property following a viewing will all be considered to be a refusal.

It will not be considered reasonable to refuse a property on grounds that were made clear in the property advert (for example, the location of the property) unless there are exceptional

circumstances. Applicants must consider all factors carefully when deciding whether to express an interest in (bid on) a property.

4.11 Local Lettings Plans

Partner Housing Providers may agree local lettings plans for managing the allocation of particular properties in certain areas. Examples include:

- Restricting the age ranges of certain tower blocks
- Limiting the number of children in a particular area if resources such as schools, health provision or play facilities are not available

Reference to any local lettings plans will be made in the property advert which will detail the specific requirements for the allocation of that property.

Some Housing Providers have restrictions on the maximum income and savings an applicant can have to be eligible for their properties because of their charitable status. When considering an applicant for an offer of accommodation they will check the details of income and savings and notify the applicant in writing if they are not going to make the offer of accommodation. If the applicant does not agree with the decision the applicant has the right to request a review of their decision from the Housing Provider.

4.12 Age Restricted Properties

Partner Housing Providers have certain properties that are 'age restricted'. This refers to properties that have a minimum age set for tenancies of a property or group of properties. The restrictions relating to age will be included in the advertisement details.

Most Housing Providers will only let one bedroom bungalows to people over the age of 55 or over the age of 60. If an age restriction applies, it will be clearly stated in the advertisement details.

4.13 Eligibility for Houses

Landlords may restrict the allocation of houses to households that have children under the age of 16. Households made up entirely of household members aged 16+ would not normally be considered for the allocation of a house. Where this applies, it will be specified in the advert.

4.14 Properties excluded from Coventry Homefinder

Some properties are excluded from being advertised on Coventry Homefinder; in these instances the property will not be advertised; these include but are not exclusive to:

- **Emergency moves**
If a property is required by a Housing Provider as an emergency move to safeguard their tenant or due to fire/flood/gas explosion.
- **'Housing with Care'**
These properties are generally in schemes specifically for older people with a range of care or welfare needs. Access to these properties generally follows an adult social care assessment. Further details can be gained from Adult Community Start Team on 024 76 833003
- **Hostel accommodation and other 'supported housing'**
All forms of supported accommodation are not provided through Coventry Homefinder.

4.15 Feedback/Lettings Results

Applicants are informed of their current shortlist position as they bid for properties, but are also notified that this may change throughout the bidding period as other applicants place bids. The shortlist position of individual applicants for previous bidding periods is also available on their own 'Bid History' page once the applicant has logged in.

Following the bidding period, information is published on the Coventry Homefinder website showing the outcome of previously advertised properties. This will include the number of bids received, and the band and effective date of the successful bidder. Direct matches made outside of the Homefinder Policy (see section 4.14) will also be listed.

This information will allow the applicant to assess the potential likelihood of them being allocated a property in light of their own priority banding and effective date. The applicant will then be able to make a more informed decision as to whether they want to consider other property types, other areas of the city, or other housing options.

Section 5 – Further Information

5.1 Notification of decisions and a right to review

Notification of decisions and a right to review – the choice based lettings service

The Housing Act 1996, Part 6 requires that a right to a review of the following categories of decision made by a local authority relating to an applicant are included in this allocation scheme:

1. A decision that he or she is not eligible for an allocation;
2. A decision concerning the fact of his or her case which are likely to be, or have been, taken into account in considering whether to allocate accommodation; this might include:
 - a. The type of property for which an applicant will be considered;
 - b. The extent of the applicant's household to be considered for housing with him or her;
 - c. The applicant's medical condition or other welfare needs;
 - d. Other facts used to determine whether the applicant is entitled to a reasonable preference;
 - e. Whether the applicant should receive additional preference on the grounds of urgent housing needs or otherwise; and
 - f. Determining the applicant's priority, including his or her financial resources, behaviour (or that of his or her family), and local connection where the scheme renders any of these relevant.
3. A decision by a local housing authority in England that he or she is not within a class of persons qualifying for an allocation.

Coventry Homefinder will notify the applicant in writing of any decisions that are made concerning an applicant's eligibility, qualifying requirements and priority band assessment. The letter notifying the applicant of the decision will also contain details regarding their rights to request a review if they disagree with the decision made.

The following procedures will be used in administering the review process:

1. Applicants will be notified that they will have 28 days in which to request a review from the date of the notification letter
2. Requests for a review should be made in writing by the applicant or a person nominated by the applicant in writing as acting on their behalf; the applicant should provide details and further independent information to support their disagreement with the decision that has been made

3. The review will be carried out by an officer who was not involved in the original decision and who is senior to the original decision maker
4. The review will be considered on the basis of Coventry City Council's Choice Based Lettings Scheme and the application of the criteria for eligibility and qualifying; the priorities included in the scheme and the categories of accommodation defined in the policy; and any additional information the applicant is able to provide that may be relevant to the decision being made.
5. Reviews will be completed, with a full written response to the applicant detailing the outcome of the review. In exceptional circumstances, the applicant will be notified of any extension to this deadline and the reasons for this.

Notification of decision and a right to review – the offer of accommodation

Where an applicant has 'bid' and has subsequently been skipped for that property, the applicant has a right to raise a complaint through the housing providers' complaint process if they believe it was unreasonable for their bid to be skipped with the outcome of no offer being made.

The applicant is required to make written representation to the Housing provider within 28 days of them being skipped for the property; The applicant would expect to receive a response within 8 weeks of the complaint being raised.

5.2 Monitoring

To ensure that the aims of this Policy are met and that overall, priority for accommodation is given to applicants in the reasonable preference categories set out in legislation, robust monitoring will be carried out to monitor lettings outcomes.

The impact of the Policy will be monitored to ensure lettings are fair, transparent and in accordance with the allocations scheme, to ensure that the system is accessible to all, and does not discriminate on the grounds of: race, age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief.

5.3 Information sharing, confidentiality and data protection

Section 166(4) of the Housing Act 1996 prohibits housing authorities from divulging to other members of the public that a person is an applicant for social housing, unless they have the applicant's consent.

As part of the application process, applicants consent to the information provided on their application being shared with Coventry Homefinder Partner Organisations (Registered Providers) for the purposes of shortlisting and allocation of a property under this Policy.

The application form includes a fair obtaining clause. It is assumed that by completing the online application form applicants agree to the terms regarding the processing and sharing

of information. If the applicant requests an assessment for priority banding, other agencies may be contacted to provide supporting evidence.

The details provided by applicants will be used in connection with their Homefinder application and for research, analysis and statistical purposes regarding the need for and future development of housing in Coventry.

There may be circumstances where Coventry City Council is required to make disclosures to other organisations (for example, law enforcement agencies) if there is a valid and lawful reason. Information will not be released to other organisations that are not part of the Coventry Homefinder Partnership unless they are entitled to it by law.

Abritas Limited has a contract with Coventry City Council to host the Web-based system that holds the information that applicants provide.

The Homefinder partners may wish to contact Homefinder applicants in future when undertaking customer satisfaction and Homefinder usage surveys. These will be undertaken by Coventry City Council or its nominated agents.

5.4 Situations not covered by the Coventry Homefinder Policy

This policy also does not cover mutual exchanges, reviews of Fixed Term Tenancies, assignments or successions as these are not allocations or nominations under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996.

5.5 Complaints

Coventry City Council's complaints procedures should be followed if an applicant is not happy with the way that the Coventry Homefinder Team has dealt with their application relating to:

- the administration of this Policy regarding whether an applicant is eligible or qualifies to join the Coventry Homefinder register
- the way that an assessment has been carried out to determine whether an applicant has a reasonable preference housing need and should be placed into a priority band
- the right to request that such decisions be reviewed

Details of the Council's Complaints procedure are available on request, or can be found on the Council website www.coventry.gov.uk.

The Registered Provider's own complaints procedure should be followed if an applicant is not happy with the way that the landlord has dealt with their application relating to:

- The advertisement of a property
- The decision as to whether to accept the Council's nomination

- The decision as to whether to allocate a property to the applicant.
- The right to request that these decisions are reviewed.

Details of each Registered Provider's complaints procedures are available on request from the appropriate provider.

These procedures are available when an applicant feels that errors or omissions have been made in the way that their application has been administered. They are not intended to provide further reviews of decisions that have been taken – this is dealt with under the review process described in section 5.1.

5.6 Other Housing Options

This Policy aims to ensure that those in the greatest housing need are given appropriate priority for social housing allocation whilst offering informed choice and making the best use of the limited social housing availability in the City.

There is very high demand for social housing in Coventry and applicants should consider other housing options alongside their Coventry Homefinder registration.

The Coventry Homefinder website includes a 'Housing Options Toolkit' which suggests potential alternative housing options based on the applicant's circumstances.

Some examples of other housing options to consider include:

Housing Options	Brief details	Contact
Renting from a Private Landlord	Private landlords may be able to offer the type or location of accommodation required, especially if you want accommodation in popular areas where there is little social housing. However, your tenancy rights will be different to those under a social landlord, so you should take advice about this. If eligible, you may be able to claim Local Housing Allowance (benefit) to cover the rent costs.	Contact estate and lettings agencies, look for properties advertised for rent in local papers, use property websites such as www.rightmove.co.uk Advice about different tenancy types can be found on the Shelter website www.shelter.org.uk
Mutual Exchange	If you are currently a tenant of a social landlord, you may be able to exchange your property with another tenant.	Contact your landlord or use websites such as www.homeswapper.co.uk or www.houseexchange.org.uk or www.lets-swap.org

Housing Options	Brief details	Contact
Homes Direct	Midland Heart Housing Association has set up a choice based letting system for properties across the West Midlands area. Several landlords with properties in Coventry advertise properties through this system. This gives additional options, especially if you are considering moving out of the Coventry area.	http://www.midlandheart.org.uk/homesdirect
Affordable Home Ownership	There is a range of products designed to allow people to access more affordable home ownership, for example 'shared ownership'. These schemes are administered by a Help to Buy agency. The Coventry area is covered by Orbit Help to Buy and more details on available properties and products are available from them.	Contact Orbit Help to Buy on 03458 50 20 50 (option 2) Or their website: www.orbithelptobuy.co.uk
Open Market Home Ownership	Dependent on income and savings levels, home ownership on the open market may be a suitable option.	Contact estate agents, look for properties advertised for sale in local papers, use property websites such as www.rightmove.co.uk
Short term accommodation - Hostels	Short term accommodation is available from direct access hostels in the city. This may also include support to access permanent accommodation.	Contact the hostels directly – The Chace 024 7630 2694 and The Salvation Army Lifeshouse 024 7601 1770

5.7 Garages

Garages owned by Whitefriars Housing Group are advertised through the Coventry Homefinder website and applicants can register for garages as well as for social housing; however the allocation of garages is not subject to legislation relating to allocations of social housing and is not covered by this Policy.

Applicants should contact Whitefriars Housing Group directly for details of their policy on letting garages.

5.8 Contact Details (Homefinder and partner Registered Providers)

The Coventry Homefinder Team can be contacted:

- By Phone on 024 7683 4024
- By writing to Coventry Homefinder
1st Floor, Spire/Christchurch House
New Union Street
Coventry
CV1 2PW
- By emailing coventryhomefinder@coventry.gov.uk
- Customers who have already made an application can log into their account and use the online messaging system.

Applicants can also visit the Housing & Benefits Advice Centre, Spire House, New Union Street, Coventry CV1 2PW. Opening hours are:

Monday	9.00am – 4.30pm
Tuesday	10.00am – 4.30pm
Wednesday	9.00am – 4.30pm
Thursday	9.00am – 4.30pm
Friday	9.00am – 4.00pm
Saturday and Sunday.	Closed.

Please note:

Changes to contact details, household or circumstances must be updated by the applicant. This is done by following the instructions in section 2.6.

Contact details for the Coventry Homefinder Partner Registered Providers:

Organisation	Address	Telephone number
Coventry Homefinder	1 st Floor, Spire/Christchurch House, New Union Street, Coventry, CV1 2PW	024 7683 4024
Ashram Housing Association	178 Birmingham Road, West Bromwich, West Midlands B70 6QG	0300 111 7000
Asra Housing Group	3 Bede Island Road Leicester LE2 7EA	0116 257 6716

Organisation	Address	Telephone number
Bromford Group	1 Exchange Court Brabourne Avenue Wolverhampton Business Park Wolverhampton WV10 6AU	0330 1234 034
Guinness Northern Counties Housing Association	Unit 2 Holmewood Business Park, Chesterfield Road, Holmewood, Derbyshire, S42 5US	0845 605 9000
Jephson Housing Association	Jephson House, Blackdown, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, CV32 6RE	01926 339311
Mercian Housing Association	Gee Business Centre Holborn Hill Aston, Birmingham, B7 5JR	0121 322 7373
Midland Heart Housing Association	20 Bath Row, Birmingham, B15 1LZ	0345 6020540
Nehemiah Housing Association	5 Beacon Court, Birmingham Road, Great Barr, Birmingham, B43 6NN	0121 358 0966
Orbit Heart of England Housing Association	Garden Court, Harry Weston Road, Binley Business Park, Coventry, CV3 2SU	0345 8 500 500
Starley Housing Co-operative	17A Starley Road, Coventry, CV1 3JU	024 7622 3111
Whitefriars Housing Group	9 Little Park Street, Coventry, CV1 2UR	024 7676 7000

Appendix 1 – Statutorily Homeless Households

Statutory Homeless Households

Statutory homeless households are those that have been assessed under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 as:

- Eligible for housing assistance – not subject to immigration control and habitually resident in the common travel area.
- Homeless, or threatened with homelessness within 28 days – there is no property available to them that they have a legal right to occupy and that is reasonable for them to occupy.
- Unintentionally Homeless - the homelessness has occurred through no fault of their own and was not caused by act or omission on behalf of the applicant.
- Having a priority need as defined in the Housing Act 1996 part VII, s 189(1), which includes:
 - A pregnant woman or a person with whom she resides or might reasonably be expected to reside;
 - A person with whom dependent children reside or might reasonably be expected to reside;
 - A person who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or mental handicap or physical disability or other special reason, or with whom such a person resides or might reasonably be expected to reside; and
 - A person who is homeless or threatened with homelessness as a result of an emergency such as flood, fire or other disaster.

A further 6 additional categories were added to the priority need groups as a result of the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002; these are:

- A child aged 16 or 17
 - A young person under 21, who has been looked after, accommodated or fostered, but who is not a student in full-time education;
 - A person over 21 who is vulnerable as a result of having been looked after, accommodated or fostered;
 - A person who is vulnerable as a result of having served in the armed forces;
 - A person who is vulnerable as a result of having been imprisoned; and
 - A person who is vulnerable as a result of ceasing to occupy accommodation because of actual or threatened violence.
- Having a local connection to the area. If the applicant does not have a local connection with Coventry but does with another area then a referral will be made to the other local housing authority. The conditions for referral are:
 - Neither the applicant nor any person who might reasonably be expected to reside with the applicant has a local connection with the district of the local

housing authority to which the application for homelessness assistance was made; and

- Either the applicant or a person who might reasonably be expected to reside with the applicant has a local connection with the district of another local housing authority in England, Wales or Scotland; and
- Neither the applicant nor any person who might reasonably be expected to reside with the applicant will run the risk of domestic violence in that other district; and
- Neither the applicant nor any person who might reasonably be expected to reside with the applicant has suffered violence in the district of that other local housing authority; or,
- If violence has been suffered, it is not probable that a return to that district will lead to further violence of a similar kind against that person

Statutorily homeless households will be made **one offer** of suitable accommodation to discharge the main housing duty under Housing Act 1996, Part VII. This offer of accommodation may be in the social rented sector or it may be in the private rented sector. For the purposes of this policy the information in this appendix relates to the social rented sector. Please see the policy “Discharging the homeless duty into the private rented sector - 2013” for details of private sector offers.

The particular aspects that relate to suitability are:

- Location – a suitable offer will be located within the Coventry district, unless the household would be at risk of violence in accommodation secured in the district
The following four factors relating to location must be taken into account:
 - Where the accommodation is situated outside of the local housing authority's district, the distance of the accommodation from its district;
 - The significance of any disruption which would be caused by the location of the accommodation to the employment, caring responsibilities or education of the applicant or of members of the applicants household;
 - The proximity and accessibility of the accommodation to the medical facilities and other support which are currently used by or provided to the applicant, or used by or provided to members of the applicant's household, and which are essential to the applicant's well-being or to the well-being of members of the applicant's household; and
 - The proximity and accessibility of the accommodation to local services, amenities and transport.
- Duration of likely occupation - the offer of accommodation through Coventry Homefinder will be a part VII offer of settled accommodation that would be available on a longer term basis if there were no breaches in the tenancy agreement. It would therefore not be unreasonable for the local authority to expect the applicant to change schools, doctors etc.

Where a child is in their final exam year at school the Housing Options team will endeavour to find a suitable offer of accommodation that is within easy travelling distance of the school to avoid changing schools.

Temporary Accommodation under Part VII will not be made through Coventry Homefinder.

- Space and arrangement – The accommodation must be suitable for the number of household members and needs of the household members. For example, a property would be unsuitable if it was not accessible for a household member who was a wheelchair user or if there were insufficient bedrooms for the family members causing it to be overcrowded.
- Standard of accommodation – The accommodation must be of a standard that does not contravene the Housing Act 1985 in the definition of 'Slum Clearance' and 'Overcrowding' and must meet the decent homes standard
- Medical Needs – Consideration must be given to the medical needs of the applicant and their household when determining if a property is suitable. Where medical needs have been identified the risks regarding these needs must be assessed in order to determine if the applicant would suffer any detriment in the provision of the offer of accommodation.
- Terms and Tenure – The offer of a property through Coventry Homefinder to discharge the main housing duty will be an offer of social Housing and will normally be an assured, introductory or secure tenancy.
- Applicants views – the decision on suitability of a property under part VII Housing Act 1996, offered in the provision of the main housing duty is for the local authority to make, however due consideration will be given to all of the previous points in determining suitability. Applicants will have the opportunity to view the accommodation before being required to accept or refuse it.

If the applicant believes that the property is unsuitable, but the Council maintains that it is suitable the applicant has a right to request a review of the offer on the grounds of suitability.

Discharging the main housing duty

When an offer of suitable accommodation has been made to statutory homeless households the Council will discharge its main housing duty. The events that can cause the duty to end by the provision of are:

- 1) The refusal by an applicant of suitable accommodation secured in performance of the main housing duty;
- 2) The applicant ceasing to be eligible for assistance;
- 3) The applicant becoming homeless intentionally from his or her main housing duty accommodation;
- 4) The applicant accepting an offer of a tenancy made under HA 1996, part VI;
- 5) The applicant accepting an offer of an assured, but not an assured shorthold, tenancy from a private landlord, including a private registered provider in England or registered social landlord in Wales;

- 6) The applicant voluntarily ceasing to occupy his or her main housing duty accommodation as his or her principal home;
- 7) The applicant refusing a final offer of suitable accommodation made under HA 1996, part VI;
- 8) For applicants whose applications were made on or after 9 November 2012 to a local housing authority in England, the applicant accepting a private rented sector offer;
- 9) For applicants whose applications were made on or after 9 November 2012 to a local housing authority in England, the applicant refusing a private rented sector offer;

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