

Coventry Homefinder Policy Review – 12 months from Implementation

Coventry Homefinder is the system used to allocate social housing in Coventry. The Coventry Homefinder Policy sets out who can register, how properties are advertised and who is given priority for social housing in the City.

The new Coventry Homefinder Policy was approved by Cabinet in April 2014 and was implemented from 31st July 2014. We are carrying out a review of the effect that the policy changes have had during the first full 12 months of implementation. Some information regarding each of the policy changes and the impact that they have had on the register are described below.

Comparison of the Homefinder Register before and after implementation:

	As at 31st July 2014	As at 31st July 2015
Band 1A	59	57
Band 1B	63	39
Band 2A	960	1042
Band 2B	235	134
Band 2C	358	279
Band 3A	12,037	11,840
Band 3B	513	366
Total	14,225	13,757

		As at 31st July 2014	As at 31st July 2015
Bands 1A to 2C (housing need)	Number	1,675	1,551
	% of register	11.8%	11.3%
Bands 3A and 3B	Number	12,550	12,206
	% of register	88.2%	88.7%

Information on the effects of the Policy changes:

All properties have their shortlist prioritised by housing need (band)	
Previous Policy: 75% of properties had their shortlists ordered based on the priority band of the bidders who expressed an interest, 25% had their shortlists ordered based on registration date alone.	
Current Policy: All properties advertised have their shortlists ordered based on the priority band (and therefore, relative housing need) of the applicants that have bid.	
Intended effect: To ensure that applicants with a housing need are prioritised for housing above those that are already adequately housed.	
Baseline data (from 31st July 2014):	12 month review data (for 31st July 2015):
Successful bidders for properties advertised in the 12 months before implementation: 58% of properties advertised were accepted by applicants with a housing need (Bands 1A to 2C).	Successful bidders for properties advertised during 12 months after implementation: 71% of properties advertised were accepted by applicants with a housing need (Bands 1A to 2C).

Band of bidder	Number	Percentage	Band of bidder	Number	Percentage
Band 1A	450	21%	Band 1A	520	25%
Band 1B	67	3%	Band 1B	43	2%
Band 2A	399	18%	Band 2A	700	34%
Band 2B	185	9%	Band 2B	41	2%
Band 2C	159	7%	Band 2C	160	8%
Band 3A	897	41%	Band 3A	607	29%
Band 3B	9	0%	Band 3B	2	0%
Total	2166	100%	Total	2073	100%

Band of bidder	Number	Percentage	Band of bidder	Number	Percentage
Bands 1A to 2C	1260	58%	Bands 1A to 2C	1464	71%
Bands 3A & 3B	906	42%	Bands 3A & 3B	609	29%
Total	2166	100%	Total	2073	100%

10% of properties can be advertised with 'existing tenant priority'.																													
Previous Policy: There was no specific priority for existing tenants of Homefinder housing associations.																													
Current Policy: All shortlists are prioritised by band, but Partner Housing Associations are able to specify that priority be given to their current tenants within that shortlist for up to 10% of the properties advertised.																													
Intended effect: Existing tenants have the opportunity to move whilst also ensuring that those in housing need are prioritised, and housing associations can assist their tenants who are in housing need.																													
Baseline data (from 31st July 2014):	12 month review data (for 31st July 2015):																												
No properties were advertised with 'existing tenant priority' before the implementation of the policy. 23% of successful bidders in the 12 months prior to implementation had reported their previous tenure as 'renting from a housing association'.	Whitefriars is the only HA that has used this option on a regular basis (Stonewater has used it on one occasion). 132 properties have been advertised with existing tenant priority – this is 6% of the total number of properties. Whitefriars have advertised 131 properties, which equates to 8% of the properties they have advertised. The table below shows the Whitefriars property types and the number/percentage that were advertised with existing tenant priority.																												
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Property size</th> <th>Total advertised</th> <th>Number w exist tenant pri</th> <th>% of total w exist tenant pri</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Bedsit/Studio</td> <td>269</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>One bedroom</td> <td>605</td> <td>27</td> <td>4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Two bedrooms</td> <td>526</td> <td>33</td> <td>6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Three bedrooms</td> <td>245</td> <td>71</td> <td>29%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Four bedrooms</td> <td>20</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>1665</td> <td>131</td> <td>8%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Property size	Total advertised	Number w exist tenant pri	% of total w exist tenant pri	Bedsit/Studio	269	0	0%	One bedroom	605	27	4%	Two bedrooms	526	33	6%	Three bedrooms	245	71	29%	Four bedrooms	20	0	0%	Total	1665	131	8%
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Introduction of the 'effective date' in shortlisting.

Previous Policy: The original date of registration was used to prioritise shortlists where more than one person in the same band had placed a bid. The registration date may have been a long time before the housing need arose.

Current Policy: Shortlisted bids in the same band are prioritised based on the 'effective date', which is the date that the band was awarded, reflecting how long the applicant has been in housing need rather than just the date that the applicant first registered.

Intended effect: This reflects how long the applicant has been in housing need rather than just how long they have been on the register. Applicants that have been *in housing need* for the longest period are prioritised.

Baseline data (from 31st July 2014):

The table below shows the average time from the registration date to an offer, for applicants that successfully bid for a property advertised in the 12 months before implementation:

Band	Average of days between reg. date and date offer made
Band 1A	367
Band 1B	295
Band 2A	701
Band 2B	347
Band 2C	466
Band 3A	883
Band 3B	411
Total	646

As effective date was not implemented until the policy change, there is no data regarding the time that applicants were in housing need for the period before implementation.

1283 households in priority bands were given an effective date that was different to their registration date. The average difference was 440 days.

12 month review data (for 31st July 2015):

The table below shows the average time from the effective date to an offer, for applicants that successfully bid for a property advertised in the 12 months since implementation:

Band	Average of days between effective date and date offer made
Band 1A	100
Band 1B	172
Band 2A	352
Band 2B	243
Band 2C	212
Band 3A	535
Band 3B	116
Total	326

Statutory Homeless Households – bids placed by Housing Officer

Previous Policy: Statutorily homeless households were placed in Band 1A for one bidding period and were able to place their own bids on properties. If they were unsuccessful, the Housing Assessment Officer then placed bids on their behalf until a successful match was made.

Current Policy: Statutorily homeless households are placed in Band 1A but bids will be placed by the Housing Assessment Officer, not the applicant, from the outset.

Intended effect: To maximise the chance of a successful match and reduce the amount of time before an offer of accommodation can be made.

Baseline data (from 31 st July 2014):	12 month review data (for 31 st July 2015):
<p>In the 12 months to policy change, there were 1080 homeless application decisions made, of which 596 were stat homeless</p> <p>As at 31st July 2014, 15 households were in Band 1A and active as they were stat homeless. 116 were stat homeless but in 'enquiries complete' as they had not been successful in their own bidding round.</p> <p>Overall, the average length of time from the date an applicant was accepted as statutorily homeless to the date that the duty was discharged was 57 days.</p> <p>For those that accepted a Part 6 offer of social housing (through Homefinder) the average was 59 days.</p> <p>For those that refused a Part 6 offer (through Homefinder) the average was 51 days.</p>	<p>In the 12 months after the policy change, there were 1003 homeless application decisions made, of which 613 were stat homeless.</p> <p>As at 31st July 2015, there were 97 households in Band 1A (status of enquiries complete) as they were stat homeless.</p> <p>Overall, the average length of time from the date an applicant was accepted as statutorily homeless to the date that the duty was discharged was 47 days.</p> <p>For those that accepted a Part 6 offer of social housing (through Homefinder) the average was 51 days.</p> <p>For those that refused a Part 6 offer (through Homefinder) the average was 35 days.</p>

Adapted properties – match to household needs
<p>Previous Policy: Adapted properties were categorised based on the level of adaptation and a brief description of adaptations provided. Applicants who were eligible could place bids and shortlists were created in the same way as for other properties.</p>
<p>Current Policy: Adapted properties are offered directly to people on the register who require the specific adaptations that are in the property (best match to adaptation requirements).</p>
<p>Intended effect: Ensure that the best fit is found between the adaptations provided and the needs of the household. Reduce the need for the property to be advertised multiple times until a suitable applicant bids. Reduce the need for adaptations to be taken out of a property if no suitable applicant bids.</p>
<p>12 month review data (for 31st July 2015):</p>
<p>56 households with an identified need for adaptations or wheelchair accessible properties were housed during the 12 months after implementation. Some of these were housed in 'general needs' housing (such as bungalows or ground floor flats without adaptations) where they were suitable for the household's needs.</p> <p>Partner Housing Associations – Please assist us to review this policy by letting us know the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are properties let to applicants whose needs most suitably fit the existing adaptations in the properties advertised? • Has the time taken to let adapted properties reduced? • Has there been a reduction in the need to remove adaptations from properties (as may have happened under the previous policy if no suitable applicants bid)?

Additional priority for members/former members of the Armed Forces
<p>Previous Policy: There were no additional priorities for former members of the armed forces over other applicants.</p>

Current Policy: Additional preference for former members of the armed forces that also have a reasonable preference housing need (priority band). Applicants are placed one band higher than their housing circumstances would normally require.	
Intended effect: to comply with new legislation and provide additional priority for Armed Forces	
Baseline data (from 31st July 2014):	12 month review data (for 31st July 2015):
No applicants had been awarded additional priority for Armed Forces service.	9 households have been given additional priority. 5 have so far been housed.

Band change – Hostel Priority.	
Previous Policy: Applicants in short term hostel accommodation were placed into Band 2B	
Current Policy: Applicants in short term hostel accommodation are placed into Band 2A	
Intended effect: Short term hostel accommodation is, by its nature, short term and so applicants need to move to other accommodation very quickly. The band was increased to facilitate this, to free up hostel spaces for further people who need them, and facilitate the operation of the services commissioned by the Council for homeless people that are not owed the full housing duty.	
Baseline data (from 31st July 2014):	12 month review data (for 31st July 2015):
<p>On 31st July 2014 there were 131 applicants in Band 2B as they were living in short term hostel accommodation.</p> <p>164 people with hostel priority were housed in the 12 months prior to the policy change.</p> <p>The average length of time on the register for those with hostel priority was 321 days (time since they entered hostel – equivalent to effective date - not available).</p>	<p>On 31st July 2015, there were 164 applicants in Band 2A as they were living in short term hostel accommodation.</p> <p>212 people with hostel priority were housed in the 12 months following implementation. The average number of days from their effective date to an offer of accommodation was 129 days.</p> <p>This included some applicants who had been living in Hostels for many years, who have now been assisted into accommodation.</p> <p>The median length of time for those with hostel priority was 88 days.</p>

Band change – Violence, Harassment and Abuse	
Previous Policy: Households experiencing/at serious risk of violence, harassment or abuse placed in Band 2B.	
Current Policy: The priority for these households was increased to Band 1B.	
Intended effect: To enable households suffering/ at serious risk of violence, harassment or abuse to move more quickly.	
Baseline data (from 31st July 2014):	12 month review data (for 31st July 2015):
5 households were in Band 2B as a result of this housing need at 31 st July 2014. Their band was increased to Band 1B under the new policy.	10 households have been placed in Band 1B in the 12 months due to violence/harassment/abuse – 7 of these have been housed.

Band change – under-occupying by 3 or more bedrooms

Previous Policy: The highest Band for under-occupiers was Band 1B for those under-occupying by two or more bedrooms (tenants of partner housing associations)

Current Policy: An additional category of households under-occupying by three or more bedrooms was created in Band 1A (for tenants of partner housing associations)

Intended effect: To allow those under-occupying very large family homes to move more quickly, freeing up those properties for other households on the register. To assist applicants who are affected by the ‘bedroom tax’ or who cannot manage a larger home.

Baseline data (from 31st July 2014):

There were no households with this specific priority

12 month review data (for 31st July 2015):

Three households have been awarded this priority. Two have been successfully housed. The two properties released were both four bedroom houses, which were subsequently let to large families who were statutorily homeless.

Band change – National Witness Mobility Scheme

Previous Policy: There was no specific banding category for applicants needing to move as part of the National Witness Mobility Scheme

Current Policy: This is specified as being Band 1A

Intended effect: To enable applicants who need to move as part of the National Witness Mobility Scheme to move more quickly.

Baseline data (from 31st July 2014):

Very few applicants needed to move as part of the National Witness Mobility Scheme, however those that did request this priority were dealt with under the homelessness assessment process.

12 month review data (for 31st July 2015):

One household has been assessed using this priority by the Housing Options Manager. This household has successfully moved.

Band change – addition of specific category for hardship

Previous Policy: There was no specific category for households that needed to move to avoid hardship.

Current Policy: The specific category has been included in Band 2A

Intended effect: Under the previous policy, most households needing to move due to hardship were assessed under the social/welfare category. The hardship category was included as a specific category to comply with legislation and ensure that cases which did not come under social/welfare categories were included (for example, financial hardship/needing to move for employment purposes).

Baseline data (from 31st July 2014):

There was no specific category under the previous policy.

12 month review data (for 31st July 2015):

There are no households who have been given priority in the hardship category.

Band change – extreme unsanitary conditions

Previous Policy: There is a category in Band 2B for applicants whose current housing is unsanitary or lacks essential facilities

Current Policy: There is an additional category in Band 1B for applicants who cannot stay in their home due to extreme unsanitary conditions causing severe health and safety hazards.

Intended effect: To enable applicants in extremely unsuitable housing to move more quickly. To introduce a level of priority for extreme cases.

Baseline data (from 31st July 2014):

There were no households with this specific priority

12 month review data (for 31st July 2015):

There are no households with this specific priority