

Coventry Homefinder Policy 2020



Revised Policy – January 2020

Changes have been made post consultation

Implementation from Autumn 2020

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The following sections may require technical amendments for operational delivery.

- Section 1.6 and 1.7
- Section 2
- Section 3.2
- Section 4.1
- Section 6.2, 6.5 to Section 6.12 and Section 6.19
- Section 7.1, 7.3 7.9 and 7.10

Section 1 – Introduction to Coventry Homefinder

1.1 Background

The Council no longer owns any housing following the Large-Scale Voluntary Transfer of all the former Council housing to Citizen (formerly Whitefriars Housing Association) in September 2000.

The Council works in partnership with the Registered Providers (Housing Associations) within the area. The providers own and manage their own housing stock, and most of their available homes are let through Coventry Homefinder, the Housing Needs Register.

This Policy provides a framework for the delivery of The Coventry Homefinder choice-based lettings scheme and describes how the allocation of social housing will be prioritised for those applicants who have the greatest housing need. **Social housing in Coventry is in high demand and short supply and there are far more people on the Housing Register than there are homes available to let.**

This policy is written and published to explain how:

- Applicants qualify to join the Housing Needs Register.
- Qualifying applicants are assessed and placed in different bandings of priority.
- Certain applicants on the Housing Needs Register have some choice about the home or housing they are offered.
- Applications are nominated to homes offered by Registered Providers.

The policy also ensures the Council meets its legal requirements governing the allocation of social housing.

Coventry City Council's Housing and Homelessness Service is the lead organisation for the administration of this policy

1.2 The objectives of the Coventry Homefinder Policy

The objectives of the Coventry Homefinder Policy are to:

- Operate within the legal framework.
- Be realistic, simple and transparent.
- Make best use of social housing stock.
- Let properties quickly.
- Create balanced and sustainable communities.

1.3 Statement on Choice

Coventry City Council and the Homefinder partner Registered Providers are 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 Registered Providers' (Housing Associations and/or Housing Co-operatives) 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. The final shortlisting position is only known once the bidding round for that property has ended. Feedback on lettings of previously advertised properties is also available.

1.4 The Legal Framework

This document sets out the Coventry Homefinder 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, the Localism Act 2011 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

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 5.

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.

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).

All nominations will be made in accordance with this Policy.

Whilst this policy determines how social housing will be allocated it should be noted that in certain circumstances e.g. when considering an offer of accommodation, the lettings policy of individual Scheme Landlords (Register Providers / Housing Associations) may override this Policy.

1.5 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, irrespective of race, age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity, religion or belief, and to comply with all relevant legislation.

1.6 Advice and information

A 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 Customer Service Centre or it can be downloaded from the following 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 previous lettings and previous availability of properties is published on the Homefinder website (see section 6.19 for more detail).

1.7 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:

- Bidding by automated telephone line.
- Placing bids (assistive and/ or auto bidding) 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.

1.8 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.

Section 2 – Other Housing Options

This Policy aims to ensure that those in the greatest housing need are given appropriate priority for social housing 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.**

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. If eligible, you may be able to claim for assistance with housing costs through Universal Credit or Housing Benefit/Local Housing Allowance.	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 www.swapandmove.co.uk
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.	www.homesdirect.org.uk
Affordable Home Ownership	There is a range of products designed to allow people to access more affordable home ownership, for example 'shared ownership'.	Find out about the range of affordable home ownership products at www.helptobuy.gov.uk

Housing Options	Brief details	Contact
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.	Will provide CCC website link following starting of newly commissioned contracts (April 2020)

Section 3 – How to apply to the Register

3.1 Who can apply to Coventry Homefinder?

Anyone over 16 years of age, who is eligible and who meets the qualifying criteria may apply to Coventry Homefinder.

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 children's social care services, where they agree to hold the tenancy in trust and where a suitable support package is in place).

3.2 Application process – How to apply

If you believe you meet the eligibility and qualifying criteria outlined in Section 4, you can apply through an online application form at <http://www.coventryhomefinder.com>

Computers are available in the Customer Service Centre and Public Libraries (<https://www.coventry.gov.uk/aboutcovlibraries>) to facilitate the online application process for applicants who don't have readily available access to the internet.

If you require assistance to complete an online application, you can contact the Council at the Customer Service Centre in Broadgate. Support is also available from various advice agencies in the city. For further details go to <https://www.adviceservicescoventry.org.uk/>

Once a fully completed application form has been received along with the required supporting documentation, the information submitted will be assessed to determine if applicants are eligible and qualify, followed by an assessment of their housing need.

All applicants will be required to provide evidence to verify both their eligibility and qualification status at the point of application and again at the point of allocation of a property. This can include but is not limited to:

- proof of identity for all those included on the application.
- proof of current address.
- details of any dependants and other household members.
- confirmation of income and savings.
- details relating to previous accommodation, where appropriate.
- details and supporting evidence, where required of their housing need and circumstances.

All applicants will be required to give consent for third parties to be contacted in order to check information, and to obtain any further information relating to housing need and circumstances (if required).

3.3 Who can I include in my application?

Applicants can only have one live application either as the lead applicant or as a household member. Applicants should only include people in their application who will be part of their household and occupying the accommodation as their principal home. Applicants can only include people who normally reside with them or could reasonably be expected to do so. This can include:

- a partner, civil partner, or spouse.
- dependent children, including children for whom they have been approved to foster/adopt within their household.
- siblings.
- adult children.
- other adults who are dependent upon them, or care for them.
- other adults whom you wish to live with (e.g. friends who wish to live together) whereby one person agrees to become the lead applicant for the tenancy agreement.

Applicants should not include people they currently live with who will not be moving with them.

3.4 What size property will I be eligible for?

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.
- Additional bedrooms (if required) for pregnant applicants will be awarded after 26 weeks of pregnancy. Proof of pregnancy will be required.

Living areas can be used as a sleeping area for occasional carers. Only in exceptional circumstances will applicants be eligible for an additional bedroom.

Where properties have two living rooms (also known as parlour houses) one of these rooms could be used as a downstairs bedroom with the agreement of the Registered Provider. This will be specified on the advert for the property.

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.

Access to children:

Where an applicant has a shared residence order or staying access for a child or children (under 18 years old), they may not be automatically entitled to bedrooms for their children, as the Coventry Homefinder Policy adopts the principle that the children need one home of an adequate size.

In determining the size of accommodation required for a household, children from current or former relationships will only be counted as part of the household where appropriate evidence has been provided to determine that the applicant has the main responsibility for the children and where the children have their main home. In determining this, each application will be assessed on a case by case basis taking into account:

- Receipt of Child Benefit
- Court Orders
- Percentage of time spent caring for the children
- The regularity and permanence of the arrangement
- Which parent has adequate housing where your child or children can reside
- Any exceptional circumstances which mean that it is necessary for a child or children to have a home with both parents due to health and/or social care needs.
- Affordability.

The applicant must be able to show they can meet the full rental costs associated with the property having an additional bedroom through an affordability assessment. If they cannot, the Registered Provider may not make an offer of accommodation for the property.

3.5 *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.

3.6 Multiple Applications

A person may only register one live application as a main applicant **or** as a household member.

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.

3.7 Applications from employees linked to Coventry Homefinder

Applications can be accepted from Coventry City Council employees, employees of Registered Providers, 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 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 Operations Manager with responsibility for Housing or the Head of Housing and Homelessness.

3.8 Registration Date/Effective Band Date

All applications will be given a registration date which reflects the time that they have been registered. An effective date is the date from which an applicant has been in their current band for. For new applicants to the register the registration date and the effective date will be the same. If an applicant's assessed housing need changes and they submit a change of circumstances form their effective date may change if there is a change to the applicant's band.

The effective 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 who apply to the housing need register after the implementation date of this policy – the effective date will be the date their registration was approved.
- For applicants who transferred from the old scheme (pre 2020) and were previously placed in the old bands 1A-2C their effective date will be the date priority banding was originally awarded.
- For applicants who transferred from the old scheme (pre 2020) and were previously in band 3A or 3B their effective date will be the date of their original registration.
- If at any point an applicant is placed in the reduced preference band, they will retain their original effective date.

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 1 to Band 4: the effective date will be the earliest date that a priority need band was applied for which could be the original registration date.

3.9 *Deliberately withholding or giving false information*

It is an offence to:

- obtain, or try to obtain, a social housing tenancy by deception
- knowingly keep back information that we need to assess your application
- knowingly or recklessly provide false information about your circumstances

Doing so could result in any or all of the following:

- permanent removal from the housing needs register application, as they may be assessed as being unsuitable to qualify for an allocation.
- changing a decision that an applicant is owed a statutory duty as a homeless person
- possession proceedings against any tenancy obtained as a result of a false statement and may also attempt to recover any costs incurred. The Council will also work with a Registered Provider to consider legal action through the criminal courts.

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.

Section 4 – Who can apply to the Register (Eligibility and Qualification Criteria)

4.1 Eligibility Criteria – Who is eligible to join the housing register?

You will meet the eligibility criteria for qualifying for the housing need register if you are:

- British or Irish citizens who are habitually resident in the Common Travel Area (United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, Channel Islands and the Isle of Man).
- EEA nationals exercising a right to reside in the UK under EEA regulations – other than the initial right to reside or being a jobseeker. (Subject to change)
- A person granted some form of leave to enter or remain in the UK without condition that they and any dependants should make no recourse to public funds.

4.2 Eligibility Criteria – Who is not eligible to join the housing register?

You **will not be eligible** to qualify for the Register if you do not have recourse to public funds due to your immigration status. This includes applicants who:

- are subject to immigration control within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 (unless he or she comes within a class prescribed in regulations made by the Secretary of State).
- only have a right to reside in the UK because they (or a member of their household) are a jobseeker.
- are not habitually resident in the Common Travel Area (i.e. The U.K., Channel Islands, Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland).
- Have a right to reside in the UK of less than three months.

The legislation governing eligibility may change from time to time and the description of the current position as set out above is not definitive.

If you are eligible for housing but your partner is not eligible because they fall into one of the above groups, you may be able to bid for accommodation, but if you are successful in securing a tenancy, you will not be able to have a joint tenancy with your partner.

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.

4.3 Who cannot register with Coventry Homefinder? - Qualification Criteria

In addition to the eligibility criteria, the Localism Act 2011 gave local authorities the power to determine what classes of persons are (or are not) *persons* to be allocated social housing in their area. This is known as 'qualifying criteria'.

Local Authorities can identify groups who will not qualify for an allocation of social housing, by considering:

- if a household has accommodation suitable for their need and they have ability to meet their own housing costs
- any behaviour that affects a person's ability to be a suitable tenant
- If there is any/no local connection between the household and the local authority

4.3.1 Financial circumstances – Income and Capital

Households with sufficient income or capital to meet their own housing needs will not qualify for the Housing Needs Register. This means that they are judged to be able to afford to house themselves, either by privately renting or buying a home of an appropriate size for their needs.

If your **gross household income is above £50,000 per year** then you will not be allowed to join the Housing Needs Register (considering the income of all adult members of the household – those seeking to be rehoused with you).

You will not be able to join the register if you or members of your household (those seeking to be rehoused with you) have **capital (savings, investments or other assets) of £50,000 or more**. You should be able to pay the tenancy deposit or rent in advance to enable you to access privately rented housing without assistance from the Council. Alternatively, dependent on your circumstances you may be in a position to purchase a property either through a shared ownership scheme or from the open market. For the purpose of capital this excludes any capital held in trust for children under 18 years.

The income and savings rules do not apply in the following cases:

- Home owner(s) who cannot maintain, or manage in their existing home, and need sheltered housing or other age restricted housing. Some Registered Providers may require evidence of the commitment to sell the property within a specified timeframe.
- Applicants who wish to register to access shared ownership housing only where the asset and income level is nationally set at a higher threshold of more than £50,000.
- Other exceptional cases may be allowed by the Housing Operations Manager, Housing Capacity Manager or the Head of Housing and Homelessness. Exceptional circumstances will be assessed on a case by case basis.

4.3.2 Housing need

Applicants who have no assessed housing need and are currently adequately housed will not qualify to join the Register. This means they do not need to be given greater priority for any

reason given in the housing legislation, and do not meet any of the banding criteria set out in Section 5 of this policy.

Adequately housed is defined as follows:

Applicants who are already housed in accommodation that meets their needs, both in terms of size, property type, property condition, location and affordability.

4.3.3 Unacceptable behaviour

Applicants **may** also be disqualified from the Housing Register if **the main applicant, joint applicant or a member of their household** has been guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make him or her unsuitable to be a tenant. – Section 167 Housing Act

Whilst not exhaustive, the following list illustrates the types of serious unacceptable behaviour which **may** make an applicant unsuitable to be a tenant and will lead to exclusion from the Allocations Scheme. This can include:

Rent arrears and failing to comply with a current or previous tenancy agreement

- Owing significant rent arrears from a current or previous tenancy including rent, sundry debts, damage or any other identified costs **and** there is no repayment agreement in place.
- Failing to comply with a current or past tenancy agreement with a Council, Registered Provider or Private Landlord to the extent that they have been evicted or a court has granted an outright possession order. An exception to this would be where an applicant has received a no-fault Section 21 notice.

Anti-social behaviour

- Have been lawfully evicted for antisocial behaviour, nuisance or harassment and are not engaging with support services.
- Are or have been subject to a court order for antisocial behaviour, nuisance or harassment; for example, have a possession order, injunction, ASBO and are not engaging with support services.
- Allowing the condition of the property to deteriorate.
- Allowing any furniture or fixtures provided by the landlord to deteriorate due to ill treatment

Some types of criminal behaviour

- Being violent towards a partner or members of the family
- Have a conviction relating to use of their current or former property for illegal or immoral purposes e.g. the manufacture, sale or supply of drugs.
- Have been convicted for some criminal offences, such as arson, violent behaviour, use or possession of offensive weapons (e.g. gun crime/knife crime) and is not engaging with support services.
- Obtaining a tenancy by deception, for example by giving untrue information

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

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 and the application will then be closed.

The decision that an applicant does not qualify to join the register on the grounds of unsuitable behaviour will be made by a member of the Coventry Homefinder Team after consideration of available evidence.

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 would not consider them for a tenancy. Depending on the reasons this may mean an applicant is placed in the Reduced Preference Band. (see section 5.11).

Applicants who are assessed as not qualifying under this section of the policy will normally not be allowed to re-register for a period of 12 months. 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.

4.3.4 Local Connection

All applicants that are eligible and that meet the qualifying criteria can register. However, applicants without a local connection will only be registered in exceptional circumstances and will be placed in the Housing Need Band – Band 4. As part of their application process they will need to explain their exceptional circumstances. The decision to register an applicant without a local connection will be assessed on a case by case basis.

Applicants can demonstrate a local connection if they can evidence one or more of the following:

- 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), or
- 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 or those with a zero hours contract), or
- 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 adult children.
- Other family members such as step-parents, grandparents, grandchildren, aunts or uncles may also demonstrate a local connection if there are sufficiently close family links in the form of frequent contact and established family relationships or the applicant or extended family member is providing significant ongoing care and support to the other person.

The local connection criterion does not apply to:

- People moving to escape violence.
- Those applicants connected to the Armed Forces who are classed as a relevant person under The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012 (See section 5.3).
- For existing social tenants seeking to transfer from another local authority who have a need to move to avoid hardship or to move to take up an offer of work under the Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Right to Move) England 2015 (See section 5.8.4).
- Children in the care of the Local Authority for whom the allocations policy applies.

4.4 Decisions on qualifying criteria

The decision that an applicant does not qualify for an allocation of accommodation may be taken at the time that the application is made, or at any point during the life of the application including if the applicant's circumstances change so that they no longer meet the qualifying criteria. The application will then be closed.

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.

An applicant who has previously been told they do not qualify to the housing register will be able to re-apply; if they can demonstrate their circumstances have subsequently changed and they now believe they meet the qualification criteria.

Section 5 – How we decide between different housing needs (priority banding system)

5.1 How Priority Is Given – Summary Table of Bands

Coventry Homefinder has 5 bands (bands 1 to 4 and a reduced preference band) 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 and Homefinder Band	Housing Need Category
Urgent Housing Need Band 1	Statutorily Homeless (Main Housing Duty accepted as a homeless household). This also includes the National Witness Mobility Scheme.
	Urgent housing need due to health and/or social care difficulties
	Urgent housing need due to Social and/or Welfare issues (including unsanitary conditions, fleeing violence, moving due to redevelopment, moving to release disabled persons accommodation, Approved fosters carers and adopters who require more appropriate accommodation, Families who are being reunited following the children being returned from the care of Local Authority)
	Coventry Care Leavers who are assessed as tenancy ready
	Tenants of partner housing providers who are under-occupying a property by 2 or more bedrooms
High Housing Need Band 2	People living in named short-term supported accommodation including hostels and refuges, and who are assessed as tenancy ready
	Overcrowding – require an additional 2 or more bedrooms
	Homelessness Relief (households at relief duty stage)
	Tenants of partner housing providers who are under-occupying by one bedroom
Medium Housing Need Band 3	Homelessness Prevention (households at prevention duty stage)
	Homeless households who do not have a priority need
	Housing need due to health and or social care difficulties
	Housing need relating to Social, Welfare or Hardship issues
	Overcrowding – requires 1 additional bedroom
Housing Need Band 4	Housing need with local connection (including newly forming households – applicants living with friends or family wanting their own accommodation or applicants currently living apart who want to live together, applicants currently living together who wish to live apart, applicants who are or could potentially experience financial difficulty if they remained in their current accommodation, applicants who are currently living in a property in disrepair)
	Coventry Care Leavers (who are not tenancy ready) or Care leavers with no local connection)

Level of Need and Homefinder Band	Housing Need Category
	People living in named short-term supported accommodation including hostels and refugees who are not tenancy ready.
	Intentionally homeless households
	Housing need - no local connection (exceptional circumstances)
Reduced Preference	Reduced priority status due to unacceptable behaviour or rent arrears
	Households where main the housing duty has ended due to refusal of a suitable offer of accommodation
	Households who have refused 3 offers of accommodation under the Homefinder Policy
	Households in bands 1 and 2 who have not actively bid for suitable accommodation

5.2 Reasonable Preference

Section 166A(3) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) requires that Councils, within their allocations policies need to give certain groups of applicants 'reasonable preference': This includes:

- People who are homeless within the meaning of Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (including those who are owed prevention or relief duties, are found intentionally homeless and those not in priority need).
- 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).
- 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).

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 summarised above in section 5.1 and described in more detail below in section 5.5 to 5.11.

5.3 Additional Preference – Armed Forces

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

- Is a former member of the regular armed forces, or
- Is serving in the regular 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 regular 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.

The definition of "armed forces," "regular forces" and the "reserved forces" is set out in Section 374 of the Armed Forces Act 2006. The "regular forces" means the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines, the regular army, or the Royal Air Force. The "reserve forces" means the Royal Fleet Reserve, the Royal Navy Reserve, the Marine Reserve, the Army Reserve, the Territorial Army, the Royal Airforce Reserve or the Royal Auxiliary Air Force.

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 urgent housing need that would place them in Band 1 will remain in Band 1, as this is the highest priority that they can receive, however the effective date will be adjusted to give one additional year of priority.

*(Example: an applicant is a former member of the regular armed forces whose household is overcrowded and needs one additional bedroom. The household would ordinarily be placed in Band 3 due to overcrowding but will be placed in the band above - Band 2 - due to their overcrowding **and** the fact that they were formerly serving in the regular armed forces).*

Applicants with no reasonable preference housing need that would otherwise result in them being placed in Bands 1 to 4 will not be able to register on Coventry Homefinder, 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 regular Armed Forces (and certain family members or current or former members of reserve forces) under certain circumstances).

The Coventry Homefinder Policy does not restrict any applicants' ability to register (to 'qualify') based only on their local connection, as applicants with a housing need and no local connection can register in exceptional circumstances. A member or former member of the Armed Forces (and certain family members or current or former members reserve forces) would be included within this criteria therefore it complies with these provisions in The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012.

5.4 Other local priorities

This policy will also give priority to the following groups. These priorities have been mutually agreed between the Registered Providers using Coventry Homefinder and the Council. These priorities are:

- Coventry Care Leavers who are assessed as ‘tenancy ready’ and this is confirmed by the Council’s Children’s Social Care Department. This priority supports the Council in its role as a Corporate Parent.
- Households who are approved foster carers or adoptive parents who the Council’s Children’s Social Care Department have confirmed require more appropriate accommodation in order for them to be able to foster or adopt.
- People who are fleeing violence, harassment or abuse.
- Households who are under-occupying their current social housing accommodation (of a partner registered provider and living in Coventry) and wish to move to a smaller property.
- Households who need to move from their current social housing accommodation (of a partner registered provider) in order to enable the redevelopment or refurbishment of housing.
- Households who currently live in a purpose built or an adapted property (of a partner registered provider and living in Coventry) that is suitable for a disabled person, who no longer need to live in that type of accommodation and wish to move.

5.5 The Bands Described

The sections below (5.6 to 5.11) describe how your circumstances will place you into a band. Your application will be placed into the band according to how urgent your current housing need is (bands 1 to 4). If an applicant or a member of their household has more than one identified housing need for example an urgent housing need due to a health and social care difficulties (band 1) and are overcrowded and need 1 additional bedroom (band 3), they will be placed in the band which affords greatest priority.

Some applicants could be placed in the reduced preference band (see Section 5.11) and this means they have the least likelihood of being re-housed. This is because they will only be considered for housing after those households in bands 1 to 4.

5.6 Urgent Housing Need – Band 1

Band 1 is the top band within the Coventry Homefinder banding system. This means households in this band have been assessed as having the most urgent housing need. The reasons this priority is awarded is as follows:

5.6.1 Homelessness - Statutorily Homeless Households (including National Witness Mobility Scheme)

Applicants assessed by Coventry City Council as statutorily homeless and owed the main housing duty will be made **one offer of suitable accommodation**. Within the Coventry Homefinder system applicants will receive Band 1 priority, however bids for available properties will be made by the Council's Housing and Homelessness Service on their behalf. This is to ensure that the duty to secure settled accommodation is complied with as soon as possible.

Statutorily homeless households may also be offered suitable accommodation within the Private Rented Sector to enable the Council to discharge the main housing duty.

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 Senior Housing Officer, Housing Operational Manager, the Housing Capacity Manager or the Head of Housing and Homelessness.

5.6.2 Urgent Housing Need due to health and/or social care difficulties

The assessment of priority due to health difficulties is not based on the seriousness of the applicant's condition but rather it is solely based on the impact that **the** current type and/or location of their current 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 clearly demonstrated 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 to make the current accommodation suitable. Priority will **only** be awarded if aids and adaptations cannot be provided.

To be awarded Urgent Housing Need due to Health and/or Social Care Difficulties an applicant will need to demonstrate their urgent need to move. Listed below are some examples of when this priority level will be awarded (this list is not exhaustive):

- Applicant or household member is ready to be discharged from hospital or residential care, but they are unable to access any essential facilities within their home;
- Applicant or household member with severe long-term health conditions causing substantial disabilities who are unable to enter or leave their home (housebound) due

to stair access that cannot be resolved by use of aids or adaptations and are unable to access all the essential facilities (bathing/toileting, cooking and separate room for sleeping) in their current accommodation;

- Applicant or household member must have significant mental health or other health problems that are being caused or made worse by the housing situation (property type and/or location) and this could be resolved by urgent re-housing;
- Applicant or household member has a life-threatening or life-limiting illness or condition which is being negatively impacted by their current accommodation;

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

Where an applicant refuses to have the recommended aids and/or adaptations fitted the applicant will be placed in Band 3 – housing need due to health and social care, unless they have other identified housing needs that would place them in a higher band.

5.6.3 Urgent Housing Need due to Social and Welfare Issues

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 Urgent Housing Need due to Social and Welfare priority include:

- People fleeing violence, harassment or abuse with an urgent need to move (e.g. domestic violence/racial harassment incidents/hate crime resulting in intimidation or serious threats or damage to property which are recurrent or an ongoing threat has been identified) Award of this priority will only be awarded with appropriate evidence from the Police, other statutory body, or support agency that the difficulties experienced are directed at the household and they must move from their current accommodation as a matter of urgency.
- Unsanitary/unsuitable conditions (Health & Safety hazards - Category 1 hazards as outlined in the Housing Health and Safety Rating System) and housing conditions affecting health of household (e.g. properties in serious disrepair, properties lacking bathroom or kitchen facilities or lacking water, gas, electricity or adequate heating) that can't be resolved by the landlord or property owner (after appropriate Council enforcement action if required) within a specified timeframe. This priority will only be awarded with appropriate evidence (e.g. certificates or report from a Council Officer e.g. within Housing Enforcement Department or the Housing and Homelessness Service).
- Moving to release disabled persons and/or adapted accommodation where this has been confirmed by the social housing provider.
- Required to move due to regeneration or demolition of current accommodation where this has been confirmed by the social housing provider.

- Applicant or household member has children being returned from care of a Local Authority, but this is dependent on a change of accommodation. Written confirmation from the social worker will be required.
- Applicant or household member who is a Coventry City Council approved foster carer or adoptive parent and a Social Worker has confirmed in writing that larger or more appropriate accommodation is required to enable the applicant to either foster or adopt. 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

5.6.4 Coventry Care Leavers who are assessed as tenancy ready

Applicants who are “Coventry Care Leavers” and have been in the care of Coventry City Council Children’s Services. To be awarded Band 1 priority a Social Worker from Children’s Services has provided written confirmation that a Care Leaver has been assessed as ‘tenancy ready’ and if required has confirmed the ongoing support package for the Care Leaver to assist them in sustaining the tenancy. See Section 5.10 for further information about how ‘tenancy readiness’ will be assessed.

This priority will only be awarded if the young person is not already adequately or suitably accommodated.

This priority can be awarded 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 will longer apply once the applicant has reached 25 years of age.

5.6.5 Tenants of partner housing providers who are under-occupying a property by 2 or more bedrooms

The demand for larger family sized properties in Coventry is high and therefore in order to ensure the best use of existing housing stock the council wishes to encourage under-occupying households to downsize to smaller accommodation that meets their needs.

To support people to live appropriately sized properties households who are currently under-occupying a social housing property in Coventry by 2 or more bedrooms will be awarded Band 1 priority.

However, households will not be able to bid on properties that are too small for the number of people in their household.

Coventry Homefinder will confirm the number of bedrooms a tenant is occupying with the housing provider in order to award this priority. The number of bedrooms required will be assessed using the bedroom standard (see section 3.4).

5.7 High Housing Need – Band 2

Band 2 is the 2nd highest band within the Coventry Homefinder banding system. This means households in this band have been assessed as having a high housing need. The reasons this priority is awarded are as follows:

5.7.1 Homelessness relief

Priority due to an applicant being owed the homelessness relief duty (under Section 189B of the Housing Act 1996) is awarded by Coventry City Council's Housing and Homelessness Service where a Personal Housing Plan is in place and the applicant is constructively engaging with the Council's service to relieve their homelessness.

Applicants will be placed in Band 2 whilst they are owed the relief duty, but their banding may change when that duty comes to an end. If the relief duty ends and does not result in the 'main housing duty' being owed for any reason, this may result in either a lower banding award or the applicant no longer qualifying for the Register. All homelessness applicants will be given a written decision under homelessness legislation (Part VII of the Housing Act 1996) informing them of the outcome. They will also have a right to review under the same legislation.

5.7.2 People living in short-term supported accommodation who are tenancy ready

Applicants who are living in short term accommodation (less than 6 months tenure or have been in designated hostel or refuge 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 such as: 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 have been assessed as 'tenancy ready' (as described in section 5.10) 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.

5.7.3 Overcrowding 2+ bedrooms

Applicants who believe that they are overcrowded in their current property are assessed against the bedroom standard (see section 3.4). Applicants who are assessed as requiring 2 or more additional bedrooms than their current home will be awarded Band 2 priority.

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.

Having a separate application and being awarded this priority would mean that the single applicant cannot also be a household member on another Homefinder application for the whole household, (as set out in section 3.6).

- 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 after 26 weeks of pregnancy. Only when the baby is born can the applicant then request priority for overcrowding based on the bedroom standards.

Coventry Homefinder will require confirmation from the current landlord regarding the number of bedrooms in the property to award overcrowding priority.

5.7.4 Tenants of partner housing providers who are under-occupying a property by 1 bedroom

To support people to live in appropriately sized properties households who are currently under-occupying a social housing property in Coventry by 1 bedroom will be awarded Band 2 priority.

However, households will not be able to bid on properties that are too small for the number of people in their household.

Coventry Homefinder will confirm the number of bedrooms a tenant is occupying with the housing provider in order to award this priority. The number of bedrooms required will be assessed using the bedroom standard (see section 3.4).

5.8 Medium Housing Need – Band 3

Band 3 is the 3rd highest band within the Coventry Homefinder banding system. This means households in this band have been assessed as having a medium housing need. The reasons this priority is awarded is as follows:

5.8.1 Homelessness Prevention

The homelessness prevention duty (under Section 195 of the Housing Act 1996) is awarded by Coventry City Council's Housing and Homelessness Service where a Personal Housing

Plan is in place and the applicant is constructively engaging with the Council's services to prevent their homelessness.

Prevention duty cases will be subject to continuous assessment and the duty can be ended at any point if the relevant circumstances arise under the legislation. If there is no longer a threat of homelessness, the application will be reassessed and may be removed from the Housing Needs Register if the applicant no longer qualifies to remain on it or moved to a lower band depending on their individual circumstances.

5.8.2 Homeless households who do not have a priority need

Homeless Households who do not have a priority need – Applicants who are assessed by the Housing and Homelessness Service as being eligible and homeless but who do not have a priority need under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996.

5.8.3 Housing need due to health and/or social care difficulties

Applicant or household member who has health or social care difficulties which make it difficult but not impossible to make full use of their current accommodation. Examples include (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Applicant or household member who has learning disabilities and/or mental health difficulties and the type and/or location of their current property is having some impact on their on their day to day life and the management of their health.
- Applicant or household member who need to move to a particular locality in order to give or receive a demonstratable level of care or support, either practical or emotional support to meet a physical or mental health need. Evidence will be required to show this level of support is needed and that without that support you or the person you are supporting, would have significant problems in their daily lives. Evidence will also be required to show how a move would greatly cut or ease the traveling time needed to give or receive support. Priority will be awarded to the person who is most easily able to move.

5.8.4 Housing need relating to Social, Welfare and Hardship issues

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 Medium Housing Need due to Social and Welfare priority include:

- Applicants who are experiencing ongoing and unresolved issues due to harassment, abuse or neighbourhood disputes. Award of this priority may require appropriate evidence from a landlord, Police, other statutory body or support agency where it is demonstrated that the issues are directed at the house (rather than general ASB issues the local area) and it would be beneficial for the household to move from their current accommodation.

- Existing social housing tenants who need to move to Coventry to take up a job offer or to move closer to work under the Governments Right to Move initiative where applicants would otherwise be deemed to suffer undue financial hardship (assessed in conjunction with relevant guidance).
- People needing to move to a particular area of Coventry where hardship (financial, educational or work related) would be caused to themselves or others if they do not move. 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. This priority will not be awarded purely because an applicant loses their employment. Coventry is geographically compact with good transport links; therefore, this priority reason would only be awarded in exceptional circumstances.

5.8.5 Overcrowding – requires 1 additional bedroom

Applicants who believe that they are overcrowded in their current property are assessed against the bedroom standard (see section 3.4). Applicants who are assessed as requiring 1 more bedroom will be awarded Band 3 priority.

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

Having a separate application and being awarded this priority would mean that the single applicant cannot also be a household member on another Homefinder application for the whole household, (as set out in section 3.6).

- 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 after 26 weeks of pregnancy. Only when the baby is born can the applicant then request priority for overcrowding based on the bedroom standards.

Coventry Homefinder will require confirmation from the current landlord regarding the number of bedrooms in the property to award overcrowding priority.

5.9 Housing Need – Band 4

Band 4 is the 4th highest band within the Coventry Homefinder banding system. This means households in this band have been assessed as having a housing need, but this housing need is lower than those applicants in higher bands. The reasons this priority is awarded is as follows:

5.9.1 Housing Need

Applicants with a local connection to Coventry and they have a housing need for alternative housing but have been assessed as having lower priority than those applicants with other housing needs that meet the criteria for a higher banding.

Whilst not exhaustive, the following list explains some of the reasons why an applicant could be assessed as having a housing need under this policy:

- Newly forming households – applicants living with friends or family wanting their own accommodation.
- Newly forming households – applicants currently living apart who want to live together.
- Newly forming households – applicants currently living together who want to live separately (e.g. due to relationship breakdown).
- Applicants who are or could potentially experience financial difficulty if they remained in their current accommodation and therefore need to move to more a accommodation. For example, where an applicant's circumstances have changed, and they are struggling to pay the rent and other household bills in their current accommodation.
- Applicants who are currently living in a property in disrepair (e.g. the property currently has identified hazards (Category 2 Hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System), the disrepair cannot be rectified within a reasonable period and the disrepair of the property is their only identified housing need.
- Intentionally Homelessness Households - applicants who have been assessed by the Council's Housing and Homelessness Service as having, by reason of act or omission, caused their homelessness intentionally until there is a change in their circumstances.
- Applicants who are (Care Leavers or people living in designated hostels or other type of short term supported accommodation but who are not currently assessed 'tenancy ready') at point of application to the housing register will be placed in the housing need preference banding until they can demonstrate they are ready for independent living and will be able to maintain a tenancy long term. (See section 5.10)

5.9.2 Housing need but no local connection

Applicants who have an identified housing need but have no connection to Coventry as described in section 4.3. An exemption to this would be applications from people fleeing domestic violence, hate crime or any other form of harassment and need to move to alternative accommodation who would be placed in either band 1 or band 3 depending on their individual circumstances. This decision will be made by a Senior Housing Officer, Housing Operations Manager or Housing Capacity Manager.

5.10 Definition of Tenancy readiness

It is a requirement that applicants nominated for social housing can demonstrate to the relevant Registered Provider they are able to maintain and sustain a tenancy. Therefore, tenancy readiness is defined as the applicant:

- Understands their responsibilities as a tenant to adhere to their tenancy agreement.
- Has the financial resources to pay the rent and other household bills.
- Is able to access and engage with formal (professional support) or informal support (family or friends) where this is required.

Tenancy readiness can be demonstrated in several ways including:

- Completion of a pre-tenancy course (e.g. Crisis renting ready or similar).
- Written confirmation from a social worker or support worker the applicant is ready to move out from supported or hostel accommodation.
- Ongoing support needs have been assessed and, where appropriate, a support plan is in place and the applicant is actively engaged with the support plan.

Once tenancy readiness has been confirmed and accepted by Coventry Homefinder. Applicants will be moved into the banding related to their housing need. (e.g. Coventry Care Leavers in Band 1 and applicants living in hostels or supported accommodation – Band 2).

5.11 Reduced Preference Band

The Reduced Preference Band is the lowest band on Coventry Homefinder, and it is very unlikely that applicants placed in this band will receive offers of housing. An applicant being placed in Reduced Preference Band could occur at any stage of the Housing Register process (e.g. at application or offer stage) and will be subject to the right of review by the applicant.

There are a number of reasons that an applicant can be placed in reduced preference as follows:

- Households where the main housing duty has ended due to a refusal of one suitable offer of accommodation.
- Reduced priority status due to unacceptable behaviour or rent arrears (that are not serious enough to disqualify you from the housing needs register).

- Reduced priority status due to not actively bidding for suitable housing to meet your assessed housing need in a 6-month period (applicants in bands 1 and 2 only).
- Applicant (other than homeless household) has refused 3 suitable offers of housing.

5.11.1 Reduced Preference Band – Notification of banding and/or change of banding

If the decision to place a household in the Reduced Preference band occurs at application stage, the applicant will receive a notification of their banding and the reason for that decision. The applicant will receive information and advice where it is relevant to their application. The applicant will be able to seek a review of this decision within 28 days of the notification date.

If the decision to place a household in the Reduced Preference band occurs at offer stage, the relevant housing provider (Housing Association) will notify the Coventry Homefinder Team and outline reasons why the applicant should be placed in the Reduced Preference Band. Following any additional checks, the Coventry Homefinder Team will notify the applicant of their decision and provide information and advice to the applicant on the steps they need to take in order to return to their housing need band. The applicant will be able to seek a review of this decision within 28 days of the notification date.

If an applicant is placed in reduced preference at offer or any other stage other than application, they retain their original registration and/or effective date for their identified housing need band once the issue that has reduced their preference has been resolved.

5.11.2 Reduced Preference Band – Change of circumstances/request for reassessment

Applicants who are assessed as meeting the reduced priority banding criteria will have the opportunity to apply for their banding to be re-assessed, if their circumstances have changed. The following list provides details of possible changes in circumstances:

- The debt is reduced to below £1,000 pounds and the applicant has entered and adhered to a repayment plan to reduce their arrears.
- That there have been no further reported incidents of antisocial behaviour 6 months prior to the applicant applying to have their banding re-assessed.
- That a period of 6 months has passed since the applicant was placed in reduced preference due to non-bidding activity.
- That a period of 6 months has passed since the applicant was placed in reduced preference due to the refusal of three offers of accommodation. Please see section 6.12 for the definition of a refused offer.
- A homeless household who refused a suitable offer of accommodation will need to demonstrate they have had a change of circumstances since their homelessness application was closed to request a re-assessment of their housing register application.

Please note this list is not exhaustive and each re-assessment will be on an individual basis.

All/Some applicants will need to complete a change of circumstances form to have their banding re-assessed. Alongside completing the change of circumstances form applicants may be required to provide supporting evidence.

Section 6 – The Choice Based Letting Scheme

6.1 The Choice Based Lettings Model

Coventry Homefinder is a choice-based lettings scheme. This 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’.

There are some circumstances in which this will not apply, and the Council will either restrict access to bidding (restricted bidding), make bids on behalf of an applicant (assisted/auto bidding), or make direct offers. The Council reserves the right to do this at any time in order to effectively manage allocations of homes against housing need.

6.2 The Bidding Cycle

Applicants may register an interest (bid) for up to three homes every week. The applicant bidding cycle will run from Monday morning (00.00am) to Sunday evening (11.59pm). Properties can be advertised on any day (Monday to Friday) and will be open for ‘bidding’ for 7 calendar days, (with the exception of the Christmas period when the bidding cycle usually runs for two weeks).

After the bidding period has ended 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.

The results of each bidding cycle are published on the website, showing the number of bids on each property, and the band and effective date and/or registration date of the successful applicant. This shows the priority of the successful applicant and how long they have had that level of priority and makes the system clear and easy to understand.

6.3 Who does and doesn't have choice?

Band 1

Applicants in Band 1 where the Council has accepted the ‘main housing duty’ under homelessness legislation (Housing Act 1996, Part 7) will not have access to Choice Based Lettings at any time. Bids will be made for them by a member of the Housing and Homelessness Service. This is to ensure that the duty to secure an offer of suitable settled accommodation is complied with as soon as possible. If you are owed the ‘main housing duty’ under homelessness legislation you will have been informed of this in writing.

All other applicants in Band 1 will ordinarily have access to Choice Based Lettings and will be able to register an interest in 3 suitable properties each week (bid). Applicants are expected to bid on the all available properties that are suited to their needs. If you haven't bid for a suitable property for 6 months or more and there were suitable properties available in that time, your application may be placed in the Reduced Preference Band. See Section 5.11 for further information.

Band 2

All applicants in Band 2 will have access to Choice Based Lettings and will be able to register an interest in 3 suitable properties each week (bid). Applicants are expected to bid on all available properties that are suited to their needs. If you haven't bid for a suitable property for 6 months or more and there were suitable properties available in that time, your application may be placed in the Reduced Preference Band. See Section 5.11 for further information.

Band 3 and Band 4

All applicants have access to Choice Based Lettings and be will able to register an interest in 3 suitable properties each week.

Reduced Preference

Depending on the reason an applicant is currently in the Reduced Preference Band will depend on whether they have access to the choice-based lettings scheme. Applicants in Reduced Preference due to behaviour or rent arrears can still bid for properties. Applicants who refused an offer of accommodation under the homelessness legislation will also still have access to the choice-based lettings scheme. It is less likely these applicants will be shortlisted for offers (as priority will be given to the applicants in higher bands).

Applicants who are currently in the Reduced Preference band due to the maximum refusal of offers or non-bidding activity will not have access to the choice-based lettings scheme to bid for properties until they have been in the reduced preference band for 6 months and returned to their housing need band. Applicants will retain access to their account in order to update their details, complete their annual review or complete a change of circumstances form.

6.4 Direct Lets

In exceptional circumstances we may make you a direct offer of accommodation. These can include where:

- A property is specifically adapted, or can be adapted for the applicant, joint applicant or a member of their household (See section 6.11).
- The Council retains the right to make direct offers of accommodation to those households owed a statutory homelessness duty.
- Urgent re-housing where a specific location is required.
- A specific property would meet an applicant's very specific needs.
- A property is required by a Registered Provider as an emergency move for a current tenant, for example due to fire/flood/gas explosion.
- An agreement has been made with a supported housing provider.

6.5 How properties are advertised

Available properties are advertised on the Coventry Homefinder website.

Vulnerable customers who cannot access the system and do not have any other support available to them can contact the Coventry Homefinder Team to arrange assistive bidding and/or auto bidding. Customers can also bid for properties via an automated telephone line.

6.6 How properties are labelled

Each of the 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 must 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, the minimum and 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 and any family requirements).
- Whether priority will be given to specific groups such as current social tenants.
- Tenancy type (For example, Starter tenancy, Assured or Fixed Term).
- The mobility assessment category of the property and details of any specific adaptations that have been made to the property.
- Whether adaptations can be made to the property.
- Date bidding will close for the specific property.
- Reference to any local lettings criteria/policy (applicants are advised to contact the advertising Registered Provider for more details prior to making a bid).

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

6.7 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. 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 (Monday to Sunday) and may then place that bid on an alternative property.

6.8 How Applicants are Shortlisted

The housing provider (Housing Association) who has advertised the property is responsible for the shortlisting process.

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 1 highest priority, then Band 2, Band 3, Band 4 and Reduced Preference.
- 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 3.8). 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 the individual Register Provider allocations policy or any local lettings criteria. A reference to local lettings criteria will be made in the property advert if they are to be applied.

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 6.11.

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 for each property, in order to make best use of their bids.

6.9 Bids that may be overlooked (Skipping)

In some situations, a property will not be offered to the highest ranked applicant who has expressed a preference for it. Short listed applicants may be overlooked for a number of reasons. The criteria used when an applicant is overlooked for an offer of accommodation will be contained within the individual Registered Provider's Housing Allocations Policy.

The list below is not an exhaustive list and is a general guide as each case will be assessed individually and the personal circumstances of each applicant will be taken into account.

- If there is evidence which had not been identified at initial application, that an applicant or a member of their household has committed anti-social behaviour. In this case, the application will be reviewed and may be deemed non-qualifying due to seriousness of unacceptable behaviour or placed in the Reduced Preference Band.
- If there is evidence which had not been identified at initial application, that an applicant owes money to a Registered Provider partner, Local Authority or private sector landlord due to rent arrears, sundry debts, damage to property or any other identified costs. In this instance the application will be reviewed and may be deemed non-qualifying due to the significant amount of rent arrears or placed in the Reduced Preference Band.
- If the Individual Registered Provider considers that the applicant or any member of their household has the financial means to resolve their own housing situation in accordance with their allocations policy. Having regard to income, equity, savings, and the price of buying or renting a home privately. In this instance the application will be reviewed and may be deemed non qualifying due to the amount of household income or savings.
- An applicant in Reduced Preference who cannot demonstrate a change in their circumstances since they were placed in Reduced Preference due to the fact that they or a member of their household has displayed unacceptable behaviour or have current or former rent arrears;
- 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 bids for a property and their household details do not match the household criteria set out in the advert;
- The applicant or their household do not meet a local lettings criteria that was specified on the advert;
- 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;
- If the applicant has already bid for another property and this has been offered to them

In the first instance, Housing Providers will notify the applicant through their Coventry Homefinder Account 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). Depending on the reason applicant was 'skipped' the Housing Provider may contact the Coventry Homefinder Team to request the applicant is placed in the Reduced Preference Band or that the qualifying criteria are reassessed. See section 5.11.

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).

6.10 Notification that your bid has been overlooked (Skipped)

If the applicant's bid is overlooked and the individual Registered Provider has requested that the applicant be placed in the Reduced Preference Band a message will be sent to the applicants Coventry Homefinder Account to say their application has been suspended pending a confirmation by the Council's Housing and Homelessness Service as to whether the applicant should be placed in Reduced Preference under this policy. Once the Council has made this decision, another message will be sent within the Homefinder system to confirm the outcome. If an applicant has been placed in Reduced Preference, they can request a review of this decision within 28 days.

For all other reasons a bid might be overlooked a message will be sent via the Coventry Homefinder System to the applicant by the Registered Provider to notify them their bid was overlooked and the reasons why.

The decision to overlook a shortlisted bid or any reason that is not linked to the Reduced Preference criteria 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.

6.11 Adapted properties

As part of the application process, applicants will be asked whether they require an adapted, specialist or purpose-built accessible property. Applicants will also be asked whether they currently have any mobility issues in order for their housing need to be assessed. This may involve a referral to the Council's Adult Social Care Department.

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 be added to their Coventry Homefinder Account. The assessment will include but not limited to the following information:

- Applicants specific housing need
- Specific location required (if any)
- Description of the type of property required
- Restrictions in the location – e.g. ground floor
- Specific adaptations required

The occupational therapist assessment will be arranged by the Housing and Homelessness Service. Accommodation for households that need specific adaptations is in high demand with limited supply available. Therefore, an outcome of the occupational therapist assessment could be that aids and adaptations could be provided to the applicant's current accommodation rather than be registered for an adapted property.

In order to make the best use of available accommodation that is either a purpose-built disabled persons property or has substantial adaptations installed, these will be advertised on Coventry Homefinder to support the identification of suitable applicants. Whilst all applicants can bid for these properties (apart from purpose build disabled persons accommodation); priority will be given in the first instance to those applicants requiring an adapted property, secondly to applicants who require adaptations to a property and only following this to applicants who require general needs housing.

The property will be allocated on the basis of 'best fit' of an applicant's specific requirements and how the property is adapted in consultation with an Occupational Therapist (where required). This may mean that offers made are not prioritised in order of priority band or effective date. In the event two or more applicants bid for the property with similar needs, the property will be allocated by priority band and/or effective date.

For applicants that require adaptations who are shortlisted for an adapted property, the landlord will consider whether it is reasonable to provide adaptations in the property, in conjunction with an Occupational Therapists (where required) to ensure that it is suitable for the households needs.

Properties are categorised as below:

Mobility Category	Assessment	Category description	Applicants assessed as being eligible for these categories
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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
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

A property with a level access shower and/or wet room combined with a stairlift would be considered by most Registered Providers as a partly adapted property.

A property with a level access shower and no other adaptations would not be considered an adapted property and would normally be advertised as general needs housing.

6.12 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 will be contacted by the Registered Provider if they are successful in bidding for a property. All Registered Providers will telephone the applicant on all contact numbers provide and where an email address is provided they will attempt contact by email.

If the Housing provider is unable to contact within 24 to 48 hours the successful bidder 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 7.1).

The Housing provider will arrange for the successful bidder to:

- Complete a pre-tenancy assessment
- View the property at a jointly agreed time.

Offers will be made based on the outcome of the viewing and pre-tenancy checks in the individual allocation policies of the Registered Providers. Tenancy checks may include:

- A discussion about the applicants housing history and any support needs for themselves or a member of their household
- 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. As part of the pre tenancy process, applicants may be required to pay rent in advance.

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 shortlisted positions will be invited to view the property at the same time.

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

6.13 Multiple Refusals (refused offers of housing)

Applicants who refuse three offers made to them following successful bids on the Choice-based Lettings Scheme may have their application moved into the Reduced Reference Band and will be informed of this in via a message in the Coventry Homefinder System. An applicant will be required to contact Coventry Homefinder within 28 days to show that the refusals were reasonable in order for their application to remain in their housing need band and for this to be agreed by the Housing and Homelessness Service. If they do not or their reasons are not agreed to be reasonable the application will be placed in Reduced Preference for a period of 6 months or closed if the application is not renewed.

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.

6.14 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 to create sustainable communities
- Lessening the impact of anti-social behaviour to create sustainable communities

Reference to any local lettings plans will be made in the property advert and applicants are advised to contact the advertising Registered Provider for more details.

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 (in addition to the qualifying criteria described in section 4.3). 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.

6.15 Age Restricted Properties

Registered 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 details of any restrictions relating to age will be included in the advertisement details.

Most Housing Providers will only let 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. Some Registered Providers will consider applicants who are younger than the age restriction if the applicant has a health or social care need for bungalow accommodation.

6.16 Eligibility for Houses

Registered Providers 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.

6.17 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:

- '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 Social Care Initial Contact Team on 024 7683 3003

- Hostel accommodation and other 'supported housing'
Supported accommodation is not provided through Coventry Homefinder.

6.18 Garages

Garages owned by Citizen (formerly WM Housing and 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 Citizen directly for details of their policy on letting garages.

6.19 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 Lets made outside of the Homefinder Policy (see section 6.4) will also be listed for information only.

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 7 – Management of the Scheme

This section contains general information on how the Housing and Homelessness Service which includes the Coventry Homefinder Team manages the Housing Needs Register, including how active applications are administered on an ongoing basis.

7.1 Keeping your Application Up to Date (Changes in your circumstances)

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 can update their contact details by logging in to Coventry Homefinder Account.

Where there has been a change in their circumstances the applicant will need to complete an online form. This can be done via the Coventry Homefinder website. The list below is not an exhaustive list but a change of circumstances can include:

- If anyone included on the application moves out
- Family size, for example if you have another child
- If you want to add any other person to the application
- A change in income or capital
- If you no longer have recourse to public funds
- The assessed housing needs of the applicant or a household member has changed, and the applicant wishes to have their banding re-assessed. (Supporting information/evidence may be required)
- An applicant is currently in the reduced preference band and requests a re-assessment of their banding
- Any other circumstances where the applicant believes a re-assessment is required

Vulnerable customers who cannot access the system and do not have any other support available to them can contact the Council's Customer Service Centre for assistance to update their details or complete a change of circumstances form.

7.2 C 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 within the specified timescale (see section 7.3).
- 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.
- The applicant stops being eligible to stay on the register for any reason, including moving to different accommodation where they do not have a housing need.
- The applicant is found to have provided false information (or withheld relevant information) relating to their housing application (see section 3.9).
- 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 4.3).
- The applicant's financial circumstances have changed, and they currently have over £50,000 in income and/or assets
- The applicant's housing circumstances have changed, and they no longer have an assessed housing need
- An applicant has not provided the required information to assess their housing application within 28 days.
- An applicant has refused an offer of accommodation as a statutorily homeless household and they no longer qualify to join the housing register.

If there are joint applicants, both must tell us in writing that they want us to remove the application. If this does not happen, and only one applicant tells us they want us to remove it, the application will continue in the name of the other applicant alone. The Council may remove the application for both joint applicants for any of the above reasons.

7.3 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.
3. Where an applicant has been accepted as homeless by Coventry City Council their renewal date will be amended to a year from date the homelessness decision was made.

Applicants will receive a notification that their application is due for renewal 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 56 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 56-day period and there are no exceptional circumstances, the applicant must make a fresh application. This will result in a new registration date and a new effective 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.

Computers are available in the Customer Service Centre and public Libraries to facilitate this online renewal process for applicants who don't have readily available access to the internet. Support is also available from various advice agencies in the city. For further details go to <https://www.adviceservicescoventry.org.uk/>

7.4 Exceptional Circumstances

Allocations of social housing in Coventry by partner Registered Providers (apart from some Midland Heart properties advertised via Homesdirect) will be through the Housing Register (Coventry Homefinder) in accordance with the provisions of the Allocations Scheme as detailed in this Policy. For some applicants, there may be exceptional circumstances that create housing needs which are not recognised in the Coventry Homefinder Policy. In such instances, the Head of Housing and Homelessness or in their absence the Housing Operations Manager or Housing Capacity Manager will have delegated authority to make decisions, as he/she considers appropriate, and these will be fully documented.

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.

7.5 Deliberately worsening circumstances

In assessing applications for social housing under this policy, in our decision making we will consider whether you have deliberately made your housing situation worse, either by your own action, an action by a member of your household or inaction, to increase your housing need and consequently improve your chances of re-housing through the register.

If we decide you have made your housing situation worse, you will remain in your original housing need band (before the deliberate action or inaction) for a period of 6 months before your housing needs can be re-assessed. An applicant will have the right to request a review of this decision.

7.6 Notification of decisions and a right to review

Notification of decision and a right to review – the Choice Based Lettings Scheme

Under Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 applicants for housing have the right to request a review of certain decision made about their Housing Needs Register application. The review must be undertaken by an officer more senior to the one who made the original decision.

The following are examples of decisions that can be of reviewed under this Policy;

- the decision that an applicant is not eligible to join the Register.
- the decision that an applicant does not qualify to join the Register.
- the housing need band assessment.
- the decision to cancel and remove an application from the Register.
- the decision to place an application in the reduced preference band.
- the decision for an application to remain in the reduced preference band following a change of circumstances request from the applicant.
- the decision that an applicant has deliberately worsened their circumstances band following a change of circumstances request from the applicant.
- the facts that have or likely to be taken into account when considering making an offer of housing.

Coventry Homefinder will notify the applicant via the Coventry Homefinder system of any decisions that are made concerning an applicant's eligibility, qualifying requirements and housing need band assessment. The notification to 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 of the decision.
2. Requests for a review should be made in writing (including email) 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 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.

4. Reviews will be completed, with a full written response to the applicant detailing the outcome of the review within 56 days. 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 housing

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 56 days of the complaint being raised.

7.7 Complaints

A request for a review is in effect an appeal against a decision which has been made with which you do not agree. A complaint is different – it is an expression of dissatisfaction with the level of service received, or the way it was provided.

Coventry City Council's complaints procedures should be followed if an applicant is not happy with the level of service provided by the Coventry Homefinder Team. Details of the Council's Complaints procedure are available on request or can be found on the Council website www.coventry.gov.uk/complaints

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.

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 7.6

7.8 Monitoring and changes to the policy

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.

The day to day operation of the choice-based lettings scheme will be monitored by the Council's Housing and Homelessness Service in conjunction with Partner Registered Provider staff who have responsibility for letting properties.

The Strategic oversight and co-ordination of this policy will be undertaken by the Coventry Homefinder Steering Group who will meet quarterly for the first year of policy and at least twice a year in subsequent years. The Homefinder Steering Group will include representatives from:

- Coventry City Council
- Citizen
- Midland Heart
- Orbit Heart of England
- Advice Services Coventry (Welfare Reform Working Together Group)

Reviews of this policy may be undertaken by the Council when required and in response to any updates required to reflect changes to administration of the choice-based lettings scheme, for example any change in IT Provider.

Further public consultation will take place if any additional significant changes are proposed in future due to changes in legislation and/or national guidance. The changes would also be subject to Cabinet approval.

7.9 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.

Personal information will be shared internally within Council and with Coventry Homefinder Partner Organisations (Registered Providers) for the purposes of shortlisting and allocation of a property under this Policy. In addition, information may also be shared with other organisations including: Salvation Army, Coventry Cyrenians, Emmaus, St Basils, YMCA, Coventry Domestic Violence and Abuse Support Services, Coventry Haven, Valley House, Coventry Independent Advice Service, The Job Shop, Christians Against Poverty, Coventry Law Centre, Advice Services Coventry, Coventry Refuge and Migrant Centre, Carriers of Hope, Coventry Peace House, Change, Grow, Live, Open Hands, Coventry Food Bank, SPACES, Once we were soldiers, Coventry MIND, Coventry and Warwickshire Relate, Age UK, Coventry Irish Society. For more information as to how your personal data is handled, please refer to the Privacy Notice for the Homelessness Prevention Service also includes the Housing Allocations Policy which can be found at the following link: [\[https://www.coventry.gov.uk/homelessnessprivacypolicy\]](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/homelessnessprivacypolicy).

Where the applicant's housing circumstances are being assessed to determine their housing need band, other agencies including landlords 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.

Civica currently 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.

7.10 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 - Coventry City Council
PO Box 15
Council House
Coventry
CV1 5RR
- 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 Customer Service Centre in Broadgate (3 Upper Precinct, CV1 1FS). Opening hours are 9am – 5pm, Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays).

Please note: Changes to contact details, household or circumstances must be updated by the applicant. This is done by following the instructions in Section 7.1

Contact details for the Coventry Homefinder Registered Providers:

Organisation	Address	Telephone number
Coventry Homefinder	Customer Service Centre, 3 Upper Precinct, CV1 1FS	024 7683 4024
Accord Housing Association	178 Birmingham Road, West Bromwich, West Midlands B70 6QG	0300 111 7000
Bromford Group	1 Exchange Court Brabourne Avenue Wolverhampton Business Park Wolverhampton WV10 6AU	0330 1234 034
Citizen	9 Little Park Street, Coventry, CV1 2UR	0300 790 6555
Clarion	Gee Business Centre Holborn Hill Aston, Birmingham, B7 5JR	0121 322 7373
Midland Heart Housing Association	20 Bath Row, Birmingham, B15 1LZ www.midlandheart.org.uk	0345 6020540
Nehemiah UCHA	1-3 Beacon Court, Birmingham Road, Great Barr, Birmingham, B43 6NN www.nehemiah-ucha.co.uk	0121 358 0966
Optivo	41 Poplar Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham, B14 7AA https://www.optivo.org.uk/	0800 121 60 60
Orbit Heart of England Housing Association	Garden Court, Harry Weston Road, Binley Business Park, Coventry, CV3 2SU www.orbit.org.uk	0800 678 1221
Starley Housing Co-operative	17A Starley Road, Coventry, CV1 3JU www.starleyhousing.org.uk	024 7622 3111
Stonewater Limited	Suite C, Lancaster House Grange Business Park, Enderby Road, Whetstone, Leicester, LE8 6EP www.stonewater.org	01202 319119