

Coventry Homefinder Review Consultation Statement

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1. Executive Summary

The proposals consulted upon would change how social housing is allocated in Coventry from who can apply, how you apply, how priority for housing is given and other administrative changes such as, the number of refused offers allowed within the policy or the time allowed for completing the annual review process.

This consultation statement looks at each consultation survey question (proposal) in turn, outlining the strength of opinion for each change and highlighting prevalent themes.

The analysis is broken down by general public feedback and organisation feedback either from Registered Providers or other voluntary sector organisations. Appendix 1 of this report provides details of the organisations who responded to the consultation survey.

The overarching themes can be summarised as follows:

- Prioritise local people for housing
- More housing options required – high cost of renting in the Private Rented Sector (PRS)
- The need to improve the information available on Coventry Homefinder about the individual properties to support applicants to make informed choices about meeting their housing need (themed as suitability of offers within this report)
- How the policy changes would be implemented / applied (e.g. concern about impact on current applicants)
- Respondents providing details of their current housing circumstances to support their views
- Disabled people are very positive regarding the changes for how adapted properties would be advertised and allocated.

2. Consultation Approach

The review of the current Coventry Homefinder Policy formally began in June 2019 with the initial workshop for Registered Providers (Housing Associations). All 10 Registered providers with housing stock in the City were invited, with 6 in attendance. Those Registered Providers who attended workshops collectively let 98% of properties advertised on Coventry Homefinder in 2018/19. Prior to the workshop questionnaires seeking views on the current policy were sent to all Registered Providers and workshops were held with staff in the Housing and Homelessness service to seek their views on the current policy.

A further 3 workshops were held in July, September and October 2019. Citizen and Midland Heart attended all 4 workshops. Accord Housing Association, Orbit and Stonewater Housing Association attended 3 out of 4 workshops with Clarion Housing Association attending the first workshop.

A Coventry Homefinder Steering Group was established in July 2019. The Steering Group membership includes Council staff from the Housing and Homelessness Service, representatives from Citizen, Orbit and Midland Heart, the Registered Providers with the largest housing stock in Coventry and a representative from the Voluntary Sector representing the Welfare Reform Working Together Group.

Existing forums, such as the Homelessness Forum and Frontline Network were asked to input their feedback as the review progressed. The Let's Talk Coventry Online Platform (quick polls and Question and Answer page) was utilised to gain feedback from members of the public on the current Homefinder policy and their experiences of being on the housing register. Between 25th June and 10th November 2019, the site had 699 visits from 561 unique participants, of which 108 participants either asked a question, answered the quick polls or downloaded a published document.

All the above activities contributed to the development of a set of proposals for change to the Coventry Homefinder Policy.

The public consultation survey was published on 11th November 2019 for a period of 8 weeks closing on 3rd January 2020. The purpose of the survey was to gain wider public feedback on the proposals from the general public, the Voluntary Sector and other organisations with an interest. For Registered Providers, the survey provides them with the opportunity to formally comment on the proposals to amend the allocations policy, as per legislative requirements within the Housing Act, 1996 (Section 166A).

Activities to raise awareness of the consultation survey

- **Article in the Council's Citivison magazine** – Winter 2019 Edition advising of forthcoming consultation. Citivison is delivered directly to resident's homes within Coventry, copies are available in Council Libraries and available to download from the Council's website.
- **Front page of the Coventry Homefinder website** (where applicants need to go to log in to their Coventry Homefinder accounts in order to bid for housing and/or renew their housing applications).
- **Auto message via Coventry Homefinder website.** An auto message was sent to all active housing register applicants to their Homefinder accounts to advise them about proposals to change the current policy and signposting them to the survey and consultation materials. Applicants need to log into their account to see the message. Applicants are able to respond to
- **Specific communications to applicants on the housing register** – In addition to the auto message sent to all applicants on the register. The Council has also chosen to write and/or email specific groups of applicants whereby due to their current circumstances may not be regularly logging into their Homefinder account. These groups are:
 1. Those applicants who are currently registered on the adapted properties list. (written to and provided with consultation pack)
 2. Those applicants who are currently registered on Coventry Homefinder and are accepted as statutorily homeless and therefore unable to place their own bids (emailed where email address was known to the Housing and Homelessness Service).
 3. Those applicants who currently receive the weekly property list and bid via telephone. (written to and provided with consultation pack)
 4. Those applicants for who are registered for the 'assistive bidding' service. (written to and provided with consultation pack)
- **Telephone and email** - The Coventry Homefinder contact number 02476 834024 had a menu option for the consultation. If a customer selects option 3 for consultation – advisors will answer any questions and/or send out consultation packs by post or send customers

an email with the direct link to the Let's Talk page where the survey is located. - An email address is published on the Let's Talk website.

- **Coventry City Council Website** – Information about the consultation survey and proposed changes is available on the Coventry Homefinder pages of the website. In addition, the consultation survey is advertised on the front page of the Council website.
- **Council run libraries** – Information about the consultation is available in the 14 Council run libraries. Each library has a suite of consultation materials available (posters, leaflets, key changes document, paper copies of the consultation survey and a reference copy of the proposed policy).
- **Citizen Offices** (formally Whitefriars Housing) – 9 Little Park Street, Coventry, CV12UR. Posters and leaflets advertising the consultation survey were provided to Citizen, as the largest Registered Provider (Housing Association) in Coventry following the stock transfer from the Council in September 2000. The Citizen website also informs people that the Coventry Homefinder Policy is being reviewed and signposts people to the consultation page on Let's Talk.
- **Social Media** – via Coventry City Council Facebook and Twitter accounts. Over 41,000 people saw the social media posts and 430 people followed the link to the consultation survey page.
- **Internal Council Communications** – The Council has also publicised the consultation via the Council intranet, email 'intranet roundup', weekly news bulletin and Members bulletin. Information also circulated to specific employee networks.
- **Targeted face to face briefings and/or email circulation** – The Council has also used existing forums or networks to raise awareness of the proposed changes to the Coventry Homefinder Policy. Face to face briefings have been held with:
 - Disability Equality Action Partnership (DEAP)
 - Coventry Homelessness Forum
 - Front line network (network of frontline staff working in the housing and homelessness Sector)
 - Adult Social Care Stakeholder Reference Group (Council run group for people with care and support needs, their carers with some voluntary sector representation)
 - Coventry Older Voices Management Committee
 - Specific Staff within the Council have been briefed, the Housing and Homelessness Service and staff from Family Hubs
 - Email circulation to Police and Crime Board, Homelessness Forum and Frontline Network when consultation survey published.

3. Let's Talk Consultation Survey Responses

The public consultation survey on Coventry Homefinder Proposals opened on 11th November 2019 and closed on the 3rd January 2020. During this time period, the consultation pages were visited by 1892 unique individuals, and consultation documents were downloaded a total of 830 times. Links to the consultation documents were included on the front page of the website in order for respondents to consider before completing the survey. The consultation survey was completed by 486 people.

The consultation survey asked questions about each proposal in turn and invited respondents to indicate to what extent they agreed with each, as well as to write any further comments they had.

The consultation was structured in a way such that respondents were presented with reminder information about the specific proposal they were commenting on throughout the survey. This was done in order to help respondents to break down a large policy into manageable elements and comment on them individually.

Towards the end of the consultation survey, respondents were asked whether they felt that the proposals could have any particular impact amongst different groups and were prompted to specifically consider age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race/ethnicity, religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation. The survey also invited the respondents to offer any other comments or alternative suggestions to do with the consultation and proposed changes. At the end of the consultation, equalities questions were asked of the respondent (age, care leaver status, sex, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, religious belief, disability, marital status, maternity, ethnicity, connection with the armed forces) in order to analyse how respondents across different groups viewed the proposals differently.

4. Consultation Responses

The following section explores general public responses to each of the proposals in turn. Responses from Registered Providers (RPs) and Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs) will be considered in a later section. It is evident from a couple of the responses within organisational response section contains responses from individuals.

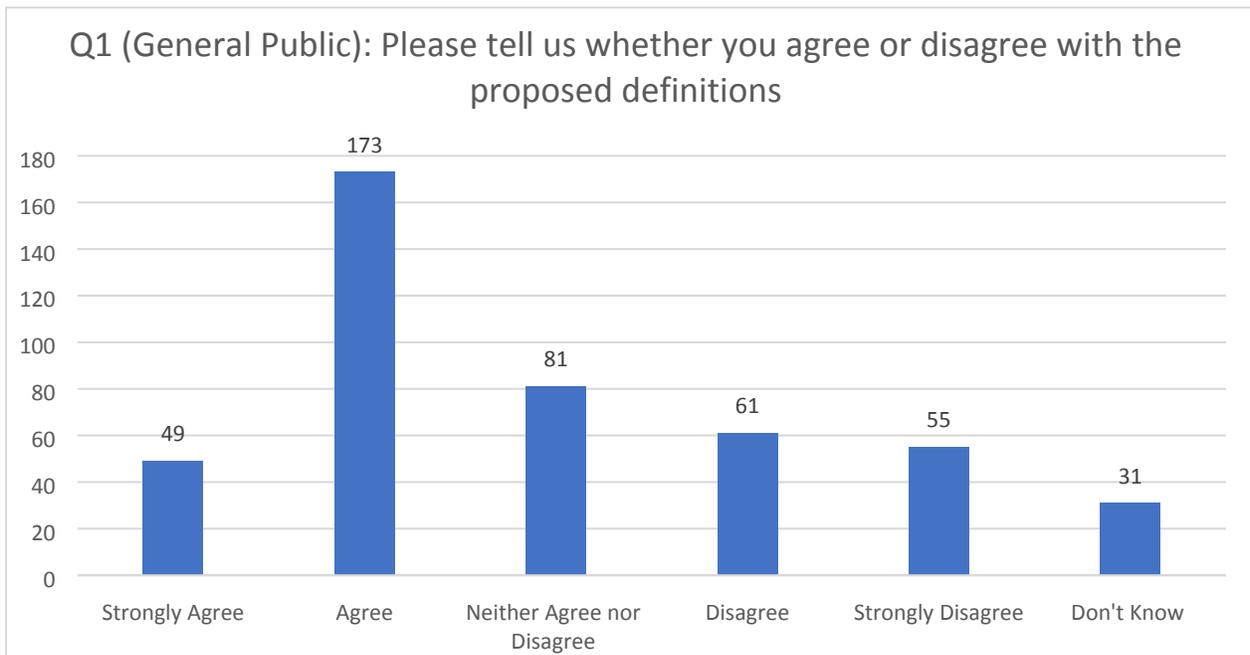
For each question, respondents were asked first to indicate their level of agreement from amongst the following options: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don't Know. Next, respondents were encouraged to offer any further comments. The following section will follow that structure, firstly showing general levels of agreement and then engaging with an analysis of the themes emerging from the comments offered.

Throughout the following section, where particularly relevant to the question being considered, individual contributions from consultation respondents will be highlighted.

Question One: - concerned the three proposed definitions – Adequately Housed, Low Housing Need, and Tenancy Readiness. Consultation documents and information within the survey detailed to respondents the nature of the new definitions.

A. Question One – Definitions - General Public Responses

A total of 450 responded to question one, of whom 49.3% indicated Strongly Agree or Agree. By way of contrast, 25.8% of respondents indicated Strongly Disagree or Disagree. The graph below details the number of responses in full.



Question One Summary of Theme Analysis:

In general, respondents indicated:

- There could be greater clarity with regards to definitions;
- Low Housing Need is an unpopular term;
- Adequately Housed is something which needs to be sensitively handled with respect to individual circumstances.

Question One Theme Analysis:

The following themes were prevalent within the open-text responses to Question One:

- Low Housing Need
 - These were responses which surrounded the definition of Low Housing Need. Broadly speaking, many respondents were unhappy with the label of Low Housing Need since individuals did not feel that their own needs were low, as the following responses illustrate:

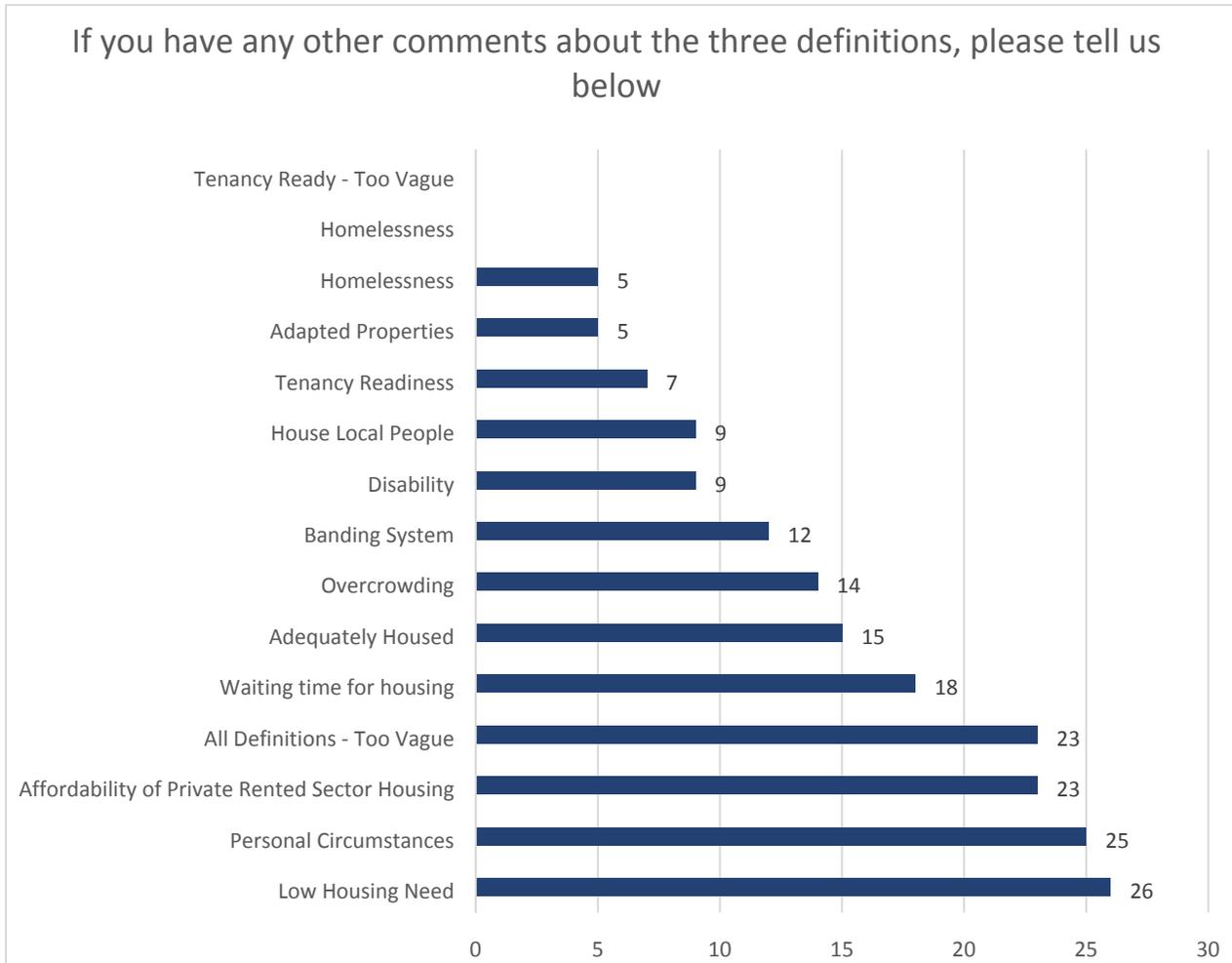
- ***'I agree that the changes are required but think using the term 'Low housing need' should be reconsidered. Using the term 'Housing Need' may be preferable as the public wont accept that their circumstances are considered to be 'low' need'***
 - ***'Your low housing need is terrible I have recently seen a mother and three children sharing one room at her mother's house after her private tenancy ended - you count this as low need she was there for nearly a year. People wanting to live together is low need? Where are your family values where a couple want to live together andvraise a child together?'***
 - ***'low housing need should (and does) reflect the difference between those who 'want' housing and those who 'need' housing'.***
- Personal Circumstances
 - Throughout this question, a large number of respondents referred to their personal experiences to inform their answers:
 - ***'I am currently living with parents with my nearly 1 year old son in an overcrowded house in a box bedroom. I think I am more then low housing needs as it's affecting his health and also mine.'***
- Affordability of Private Rented Sector Housing
 - A consistent theme throughout the responses was the unaffordability of Private Sector lettings, which many respondents said made it impossible for them to find accommodation outside Homefinder. Responses in this theme were commonly linked to the definition of Adequately Housed, as detailed below.
- Definitions Too Vague
 - A number of respondents spoke about how they felt that the definitions felt too vague or unclear, worrying about how they would be applied in practice:
 - ***"Tenancy readiness' is an entirely superfluous and unnecessary criterion. Whosoever is paid to interpret it with respect to applications for housing is in an entirely arbitrary position of authority over applicants, is presenting an unnecessary extra level of obstructive procedure to applicants, and is thereby making the application procedure less and not more efficient than it already is'***
 - ***'Wide ranging categories are too ambiguous. They need to be more specific.'***
- Waiting Time for Housing
 - A large number of respondents expressed a frustration to do with how long people wait on Homefinder before being housed.
- Adequately Housed
 - A large number of respondents felt badly about this definition. Particularly, respondents wanted the classification of Adequately Housed to be more sensitive to their individual circumstances, financial struggles, and any associated health issues. Respondents also wished for this definition to be clearer.
 - ***'Adequately housed is far too general and needs to have far more issues taken into consideration. Such as is the house they are currently situated in, more expensive than they can afford with any longevity with no alternatives such as estate agents/private landlords to them. Are those with increasing medical needs ignored because***

they have an adequate sized house with suitable amount of bedrooms yet cannot make it upstairs to them ignored? Please extend on these definitions in more detail.'

- Overcrowding
 - A number of responses expressed a wish that overcrowding was given stronger weighting with regards to the implementation of the three definitions:
 - ***'I find that tenants like myself. Should be more of a priority to needs of housing. I'm over crowded with 3 children and 2 of them children are still sharing my bedroom. I think more should be done to help.'***
- Banding System
 - A number of respondents were unclear as to how these definitions would relate to the banding system.
 - ***'CONCERNED ABOUT HOW THE BANDING WOULD BE APPLIED.'***
 - ***'How does these changes apply to families with children of different sex and age, who are living in overcrowded homes?'***
- Disability
 - A number of different respondents spoke about how disability related to things such as overcrowding in homes. In particular, a number of respondents spoke about how there can be a struggle with children with autism sharing rooms with other siblings.
 - ***'What about two same sec children where one has disabilities? ... my children are struggling in one bedroom. Older son is using my bedroom for the time of doing his homework as with younger autistic brother in the same room it is not possible. Sleeping disorders and again older son is suffering.'***
- House Local People
 - A number of respondents indicated a wish that local people who are born in Coventry be given a greater priority for housing than they already do.
- Tenancy Readiness
 - Respondents felt unclear about the definition of Tenancy readiness:
 - ***'Im also disagree with Tenancy Readiness policy. If the people living in supported accommodation such as hostels, are going to be the first to get home once they are ready for their own tenancy its not a problem for me, but if, in your opinion, benefits are going to be that readiness, I disagree completely. If the readiness in your opinion means employmen, I agree'***
- Adapted Properties
 - Some respondents wanted there to be a greater focus on disability adaptations with relation to whether housing is considered adequate:
 - ***'I think there should be a little more clarity with respect to disability. It may be that people are in a home that is the right size, not in disrepair, etc. but does not suit needs because of disability. This, as is the case in other councils, is not always considered appropriately'***
- Homelessness
 - There was a concern amongst respondents to do with the status of homeless people who were staying with friends or family:

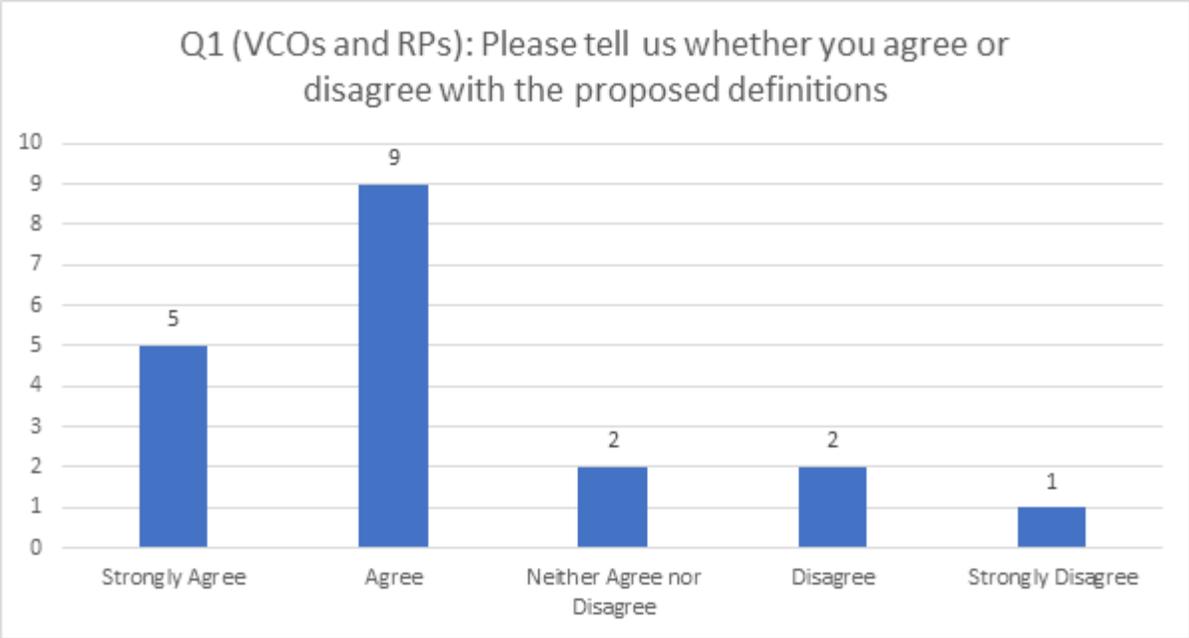
- **‘Ultimately I feel uncomfortable that these changes suggest that provided you are staying with friends, your housing need is lower than others’**

The following graph details the relative prevalence of each of the above themes.

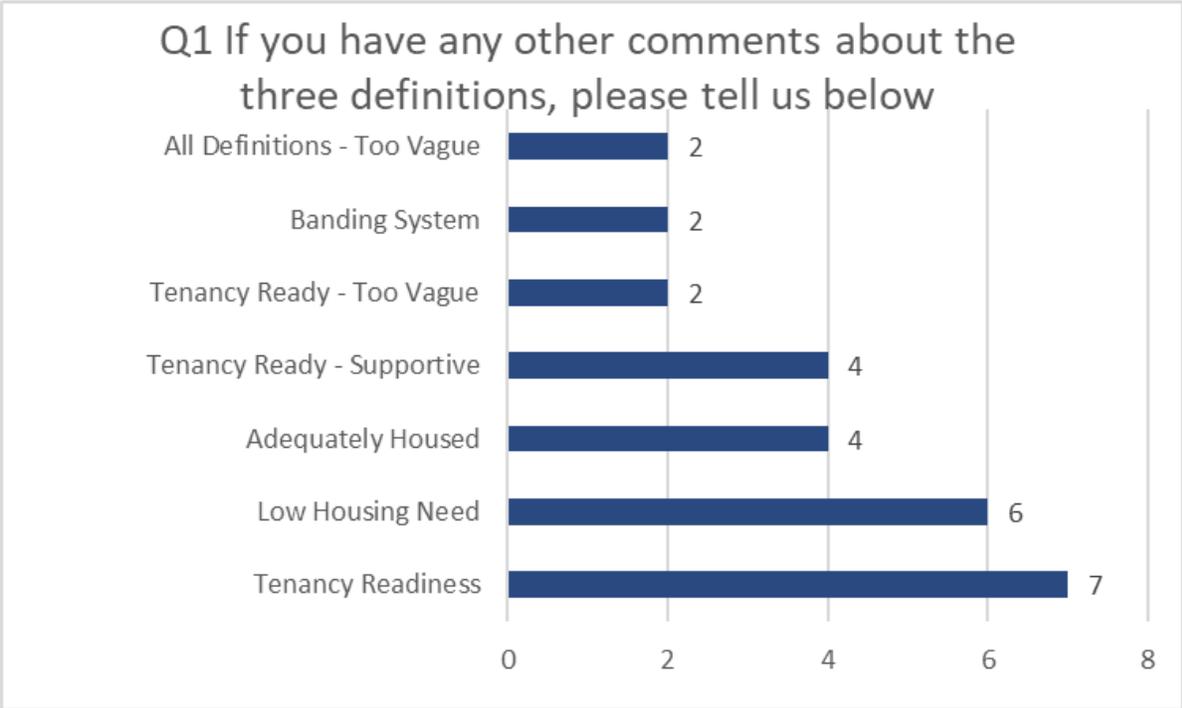


B. Question One – Definitions - VCOs and RPs Responses

A total of 19 responded to question one, of whom 74% indicated Strongly Agree or Agree. By way of contrast, 16% of respondents indicated Strongly Disagree or Disagree. The graph below details the number of responses in full.



In comparison with the General Public, the VCOs and RPs are more positive towards the proposed definition. VCOs and RP responses also shared some of the themes which were present in the General public responses:



Within each of the themes, VCOs and RPs were supportive of the definitions offered and many responses indicated that they welcomed the new definitions and their simplicity. Some other responses, however noted that they wished for more clarity with regard to some of the definitions:

- ***‘ Separately, on ‘tenancy readiness’, there is an important point of clarification required. In our view it must be assumed that if an applicant to Homefinder ‘passes the tenancy ready test’ at the application stage there should be no additional test applied to their tenancy readiness by prospective landlords at the pre-tenancy interview. Being turned down at the final stage of bidding, on tenancy ready terms, should only happen - in our view - if the client has been unable to prove the claims they made at the application stage or if their circumstances have changed and no notification to Homefinder had been made.’***
- ***‘Low Housing Need – this definition of affordability conflicts a little with the Adequately Housed definition, which includes that the current property should be affordable. Homelessness legislation also considers that an applicant could be homeless if their accommodation is not affordable. There should be flexibility to assess affordability as accurately as possible before rejecting an application for this reason.’***
- ***‘We would like more clarity about those who are not care leavers or hostel dwellers, and what situations would cause their applications to be skipped.’***

Question Two: - Qualification Criteria – General Public Responses

This question was to do with proposed changes in the way in which people will apply to housing on Homefinder. The proposals involved changing the qualification criteria such that only households with an assessed housing need and local connection would be able to apply (though allowing those with a housing need and no local connection in exceptional circumstances), as well as adding an asset/income cap. As before, respondents were able to answer Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, and Don't Know to the question, as well as to leave a free-text response.

C. Question Two – Qualification Criteria - General Public Responses

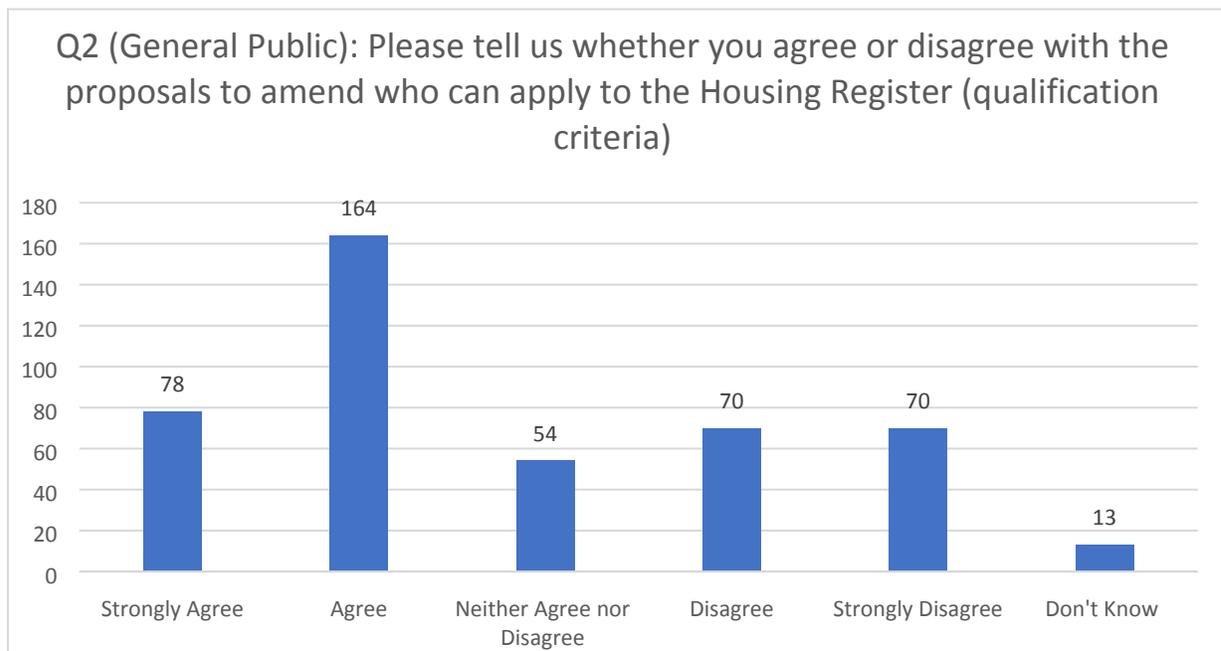
A total of 449 people indicated their level of agreement to this proposal, amongst whom:

- 53.9% either indicated Strongly Agree or Agree
- 31.2% either indicated Strongly Disagree or Disagree

The following graph details the number of responses in full:

Question Two: Summary of Theme Analysis

The general themes of the discussion were the following:



- Respondents were concerned about the Adequately Housed criterion, and whether it would be sensitive to individual cases;
- Whilst Low Housing Need was controversial in the previous question, a number of responses indicated support for a similar category;
- Whilst many were keen that only locals be housed on Homefinder, others were concerned that certain groups may lose out, for instance those fleeing domestic violence.

Question Two: Theme Analysis

The following themes were most prevalent within the open-text responses on this set of proposals:

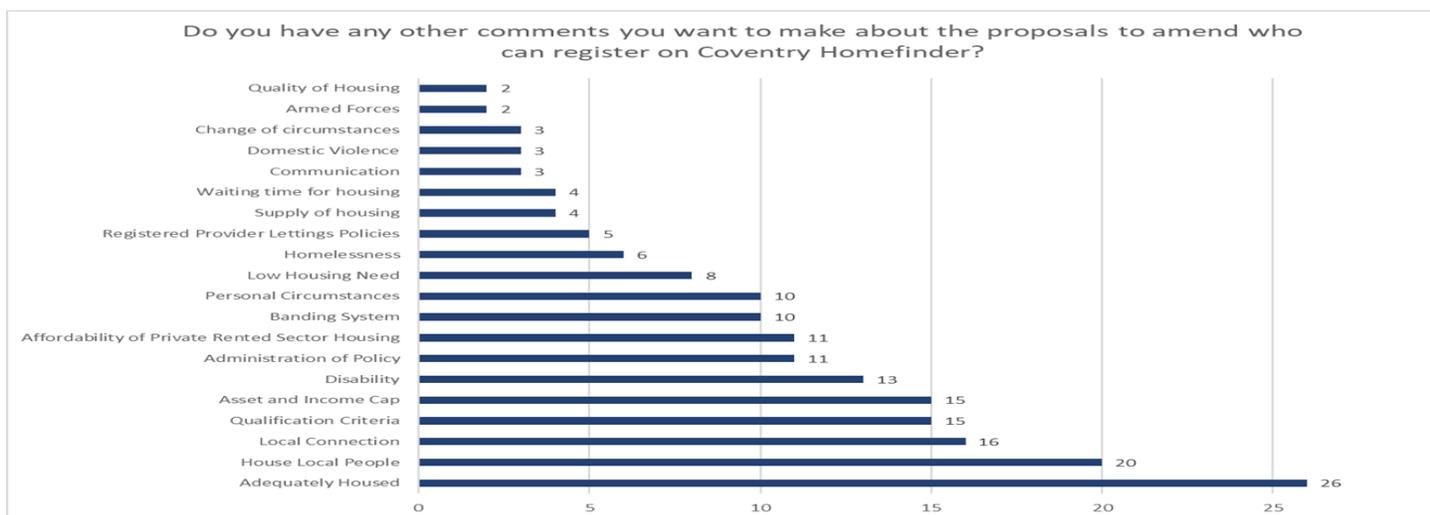
- Adequately Housed
 - As with the previous question, many respondents took issue with the idea of Adequately Housed, particularly when it was related to who would be able to apply for the register. Respondents expressed a wish that individual circumstances would be considered on a case by case basis:
 - ***'Again, the definition of 'adequately housed' is a superfluous criterion that is open to interpretation, and whosoever is responsible for interpreting it with respect to housing applications is simply presenting another arbitrary layer of inefficient and obstructive bureaucracy to the application process. And then what the authority considers to be 'adequate' housing can change at any time. Whilst similarly at any time, adequate housing can quickly become inadequate housing, with occupants of such housing left with no recourse to obtain adequate housing since the authority already considers them to be adequately housed. It should be enough that an applicant considers themselves to be inadequately housed. How they are rehoused will still be dependent upon their needs.'***
 - ***'Adequately housed - this needs to be reviewed where there are special needs children in household. Many families will lose the right to use Homefinder because they are adequately but inadequately housed.'***
- House Local People
 - This theme is comprised of a number of responses who wished for housing to be allocated to those who were born in Coventry.
- Local Connection
 - There is some overlap between this theme and the previous theme, but this theme was focused more closely on the Local Connection criteria. In each of these themes, respondents were keen for those with local connections to be housed first.
- Asset and Income Cap
 - A number of people commented on the proposed income cap. Many of the comments on this theme disagreed with the income cap, though others were either supportive or were more concerned that it be set and implemented in the right way:
 - **'Asset and income cap should not be added'**
 - **'I dont agree with the income cap houses are a ridiculous price you need to earn over 60 grand or more to afford a mortgage'**
- Disability
 - As was the case for the previous question, a number of respondents were concerned about how disability would relate to ideas of being adequately housed.

- ***'What about people who appear to be adequately housed but due to failing health, eg arthritis need housing on the ground and not in high rise accommodation'***
- Administration of Policy
 - A number of respondents were concerned about how the policy would be implemented. A particular worry to do with fair assessments was expressed by some.
 - ***'I do feel that as it may be difficult for some applicants to get the right words on paper they should be able to have a meeting with a housing officer at their current property to explain their need and where the property and size of bedrooms etc can be witnessed before a decision is made'***
- Affordability of Private Sector Housing
 - A number of respondents, as in the previous question, spoke about how private sector housing is unaffordable and how this financial pressure should be taken into account when considering assessing whether somebody is adequately housed.
 - ***'Just because someone appears to be 'adequately housed', should not mean they can no longer apply. People have no choice but to rent privately, if they have the means to do so, live in inadequate housing, find creative ways to support themselves etc. Some people only just manage, but because they're 'adequately housed' & managing, you're going to refuse them eligibility??'***
- Banding System
 - Some respondents talked about different changes to how the banding system could be changed with regards to different situations. Many of these situations stem from personal examples. There was also a concern with regards to what will happen to those who have been waiting on the existing system:
 - ***'What about those already on band 3a who have been on the list for years'***
 - ***'many have been waiting years totally unfair to change. given i myself have been collecting information for 3 years to see which properties have been allocated by application date.... instead of band my find has been shocking.'***
 - ***'I am housed but have a three bedroomed house. I'm on my own. It is difficult because I need to downsize because I may not in the future be able to afford my property. I hope I'm not being let down by the system or other people are let down on this its to scary to think about.'***
- Personal Circumstances
 - As before, a large number of responses were supported by personal examples from the lives of respondents.

- Low Housing Need
 - Whilst Low Housing Need was shown to be a controversial term in the previous question, nonetheless, many respondents expressed a wish for things which could be factored into that category. In that way, respondents can be viewed to be opposed to Low Housing Need in name, but not principle.
 - ***'It is not fair to refuse those who wish to register if they are deemed 'adequately housed' sometimes people need to move areas for family etc and so they should still be allowed to register and given low priority'***
 - ***'People who are 'housed' but are struggling with their current accommodation should have the option to explore different tendencies on Homefinder'***
 - ***'If there is no housing need they should not be held on the register as they have other options available'***
- Homelessness
 - There was a particular worry with regards to how local connection requirements might affect homeless people who may have no local connection:
 - ***'My only question is how will people with no local connection to Coventry be housed? I do have a local connection but surely this would see a rise in homelessness?'***
 - ***'Many of the street homeless/rough sleeper homeless that we work with have been in Coventry for a significant time, but other than being homeless in the city, they have no official connections with Coventry and therefore I worry that they will be classified as not being exceptional circumstances and therefore not able to be helped.'***
 - There was also a worry expressed that Adequately Housed criteria might lead to some becoming homeless.
 - ***'Really depends on how the definition of "adequately housed" is applied in practice... Have to be careful that skilled advisors are available where needed or some people will suffer homelessness they don't deserve.'***
- Registered Provider Lettings Policies
 - Responses in this theme had to do with options to swap housing with other properties allocated on Homefinder.
 - ***'This will not help people who wish to move out of the current area they live, home swapping doesn't really work with the great difference in house sizes in Coventry you can be turned down by swappers for that alone'***

- Supply of Housing
 - These responses were to do with a housing shortage in Coventry.
- Waiting Time for Housing
 - As in the previous question, a large number of people expressed a frustration with long waiting times.
- Communication
 - These were a number of responses where communication could play a role in the better delivery of the policy, as well as in engagement more broadly.
- Domestic Violence
 - A number of respondents were worried about whether those fleeing domestic violence would still be able to register, especially given that many of them may be new to the Coventry area.
 - ***'wouldn't want anyone to miss out due to the criteria ie someone fleeing an abusive relationship who could be new to area'***
- Change of Circumstances
 - This theme surrounded the idea that somebody who has been adequately housed may later find their accommodation unsuitable.
- Armed Forces
 - Two consultation respondents talked about how there ought to be greater priority given to armed forces personnel – including one who wanted this to be an exception to local housing requirements.
 - ***'Local people must come first with being housed. Born here, contributing to society, apart from veterans who should be housed first'***

The below graph shows the relative prevalence of the themes shown above:



D. Question Two – Qualification Criteria - VCOs and RPs Responses

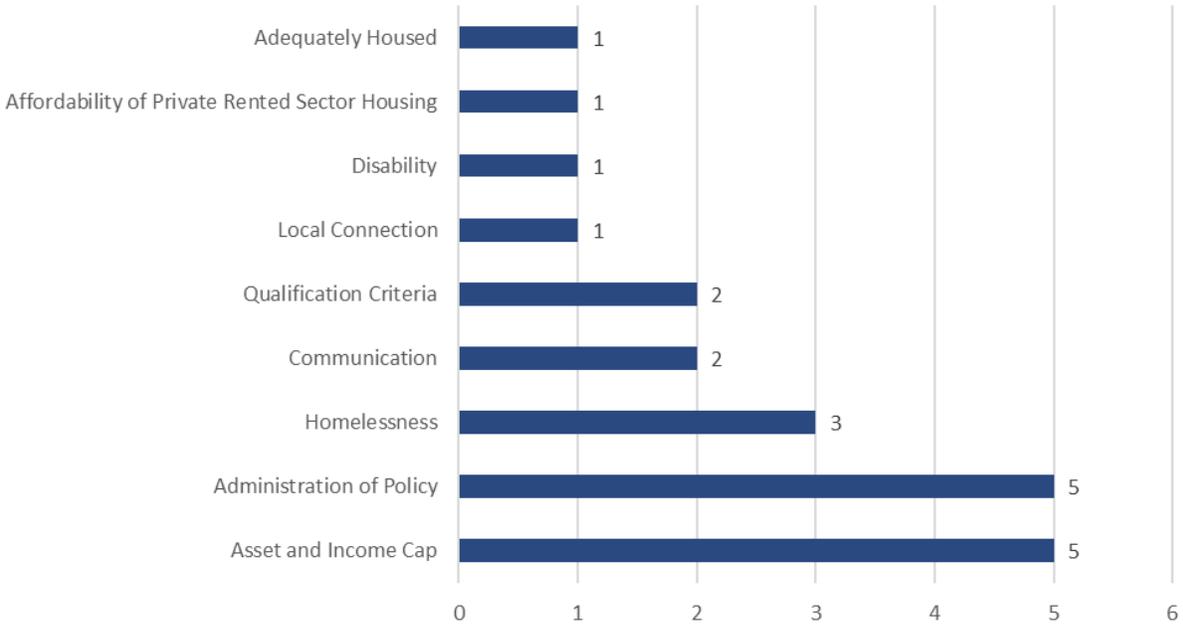
A total of 19 responded to question two, of whom 68% indicated Strongly Agree or Agree. By way of contrast, 16% indicated Strongly Disagree or Disagree. The graph below details the number of responses in full.



In comparison with the General Public, the VCOs and RPs are more positive towards the proposed definition. In contrast to the responses of the general public, VCOs and RPs were less concerned with the Adequately Housed criterion, and were more concerned with the manner in which the change in Homefinder’s focus would be communicated with existing applicants, as well as seeking clarity on the Asset and Income Cap:

- ***‘Coventry CA acknowledges that this is a significant revision of existing policy and, in effect, re-channels the purpose of Homefinder from being perceived and used as a ‘council house waiting list’ to being focused on preventing or reducing homelessness for those in priority housing need. CCA supports this change of focus, particularly in the wider context of growing homelessness and reducing amounts of available affordable housing, but wants to make absolutely clear its concerns around how the unavoidable reassessment of all those currently registered on Homefinder will be communicated and carried out; especially to vulnerable tenants who have an embedded view of what Homefinder is for. Coventry CA is also concerned that it may not be clear enough from the consultation documents that there will be an income-based barrier to registering on Homefinder as well as a housing priority consideration. Though CCA understands and supports the income barrier we are not clear that these specific proposals have been given enough prominence in the consultation exercise to elicit important comment from those who might be affected’***

Do you have any other comments you want to make about the proposals to amend who can register on Coventry Homefinder?



Question Three: - Changing the banding system

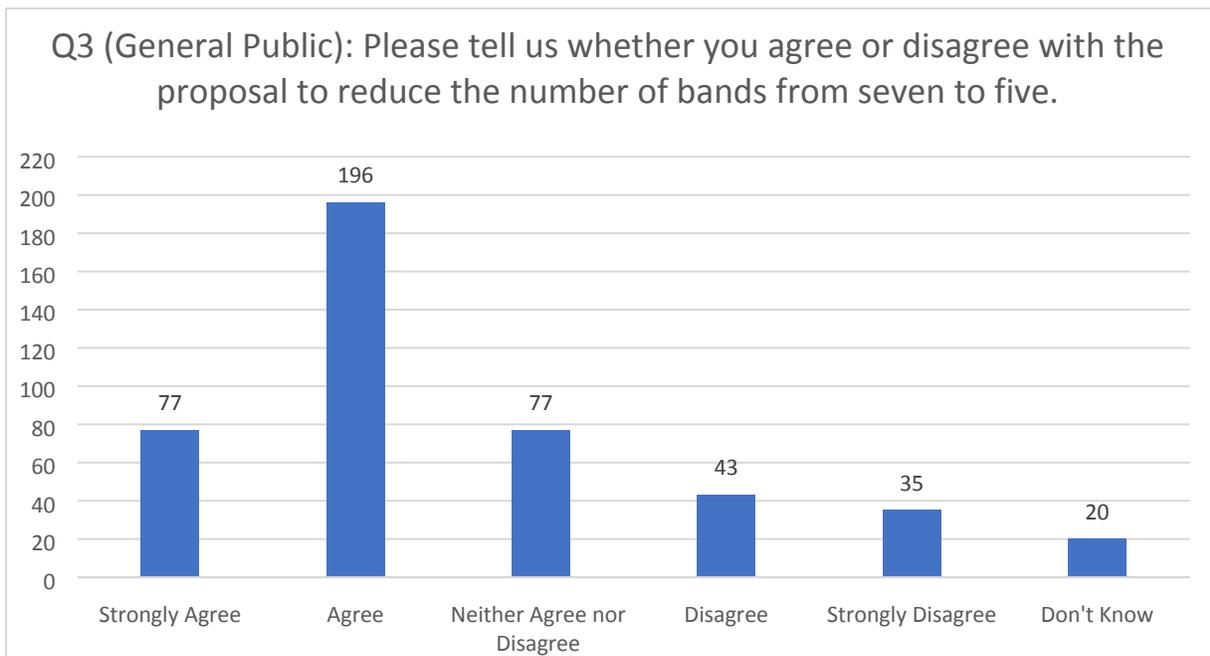
This question concerned proposals to change the banding system from seven bands to five. Implementing this proposal would result in some people on Homefinder being given different levels of priority from before. As before, respondents were able to indicate their level of agreement as either Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree or Don't Know.

E. Question Three – Changing the banding system - General Public Responses

A total of 448 people responded to the question, amongst whom:

- 61% indicated Strongly Agree or Agree
- 17.4% indicated Strongly Disagree or Disagree

The following chart details the number of people indicating each level of agreement to the proposals:



Question Three: Summary of Theme Analysis

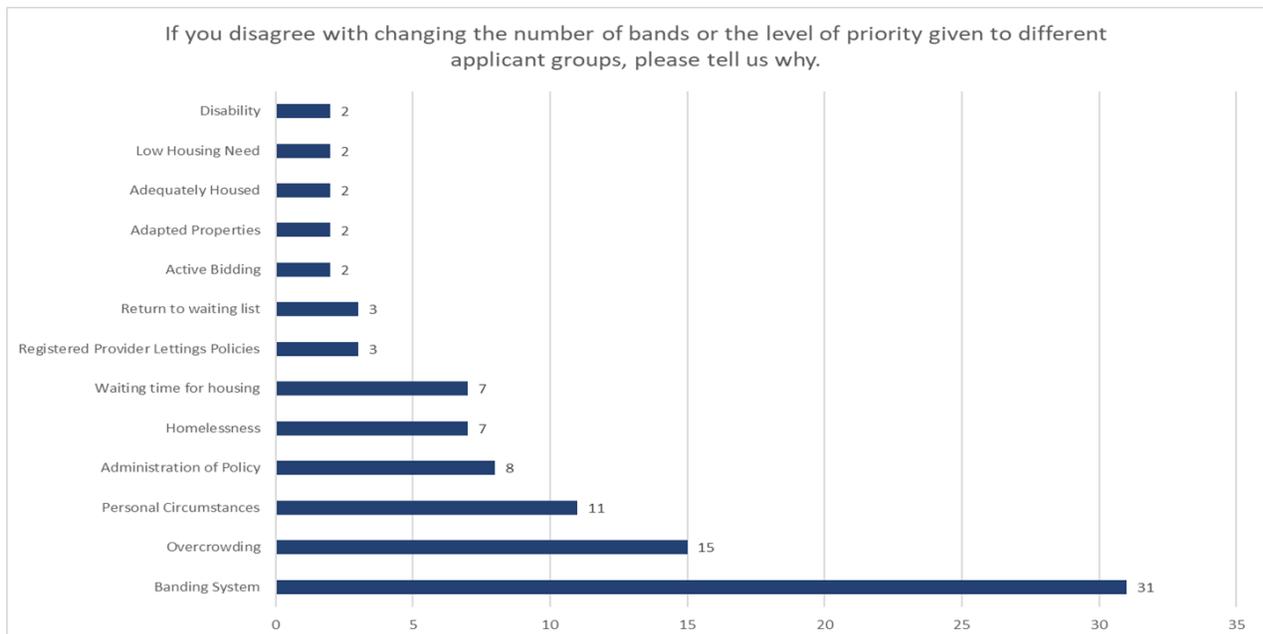
- The largest public worry to do with this proposal was related to the impact of changing the banding system upon those who are already registered on the Homefinder system.
- Some respondents were worried that the change in banding might lead to more people becoming homeless in order to seek higher priority for housing.
- Many respondents were supportive but were interested in how the policy would be carried out in practice.

Question Three: Theme Analysis

The following themes were most prevalent in the free-text responses to this proposal:

- Banding System
 - Responses focused on the banding system largely fell into one of four themes which will be explored more deeply later:
 - Multiple Housing needs
 - No change needed
 - Agreement with the reduction of bands
 - Impact on current applicants
- Overcrowding
 - This theme was comprised of a number of people who were concerned that their banding may be reassessed as a less urgent need.
- Personal Circumstances
- Administration of Policy
 - Responses in this theme were to do with the fair and correct application of the new bands.
- Homelessness
 - A number of responses were concerned that the policy could lead to homelessness as a result of priority help being given to those who are homeless:
 - ***'No wonder homelessness is on the rise if the only way your local council will help you is if you are homeless.'***
- Waiting Time for Housing
 - A number of respondents were concerned that a reduction in the number of bands might lead to longer waiting times:
 - ***'I disagree because changing the banding is changing people's priority the wait for a house is already long enough and I'm concerned this will make it longer, I'm over crowded and I'm still not any closer to being offered a bigger home'***

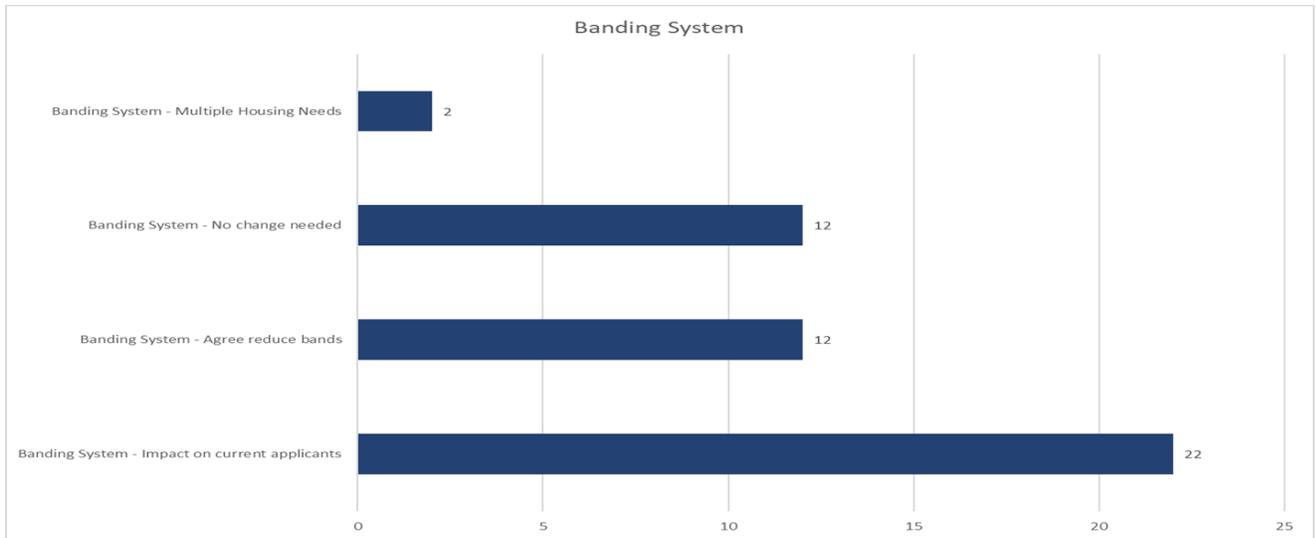
The following graph shows the relative prevalence of the themes:



As previously mentioned, there were a number of comments which were focused on the number of bands.

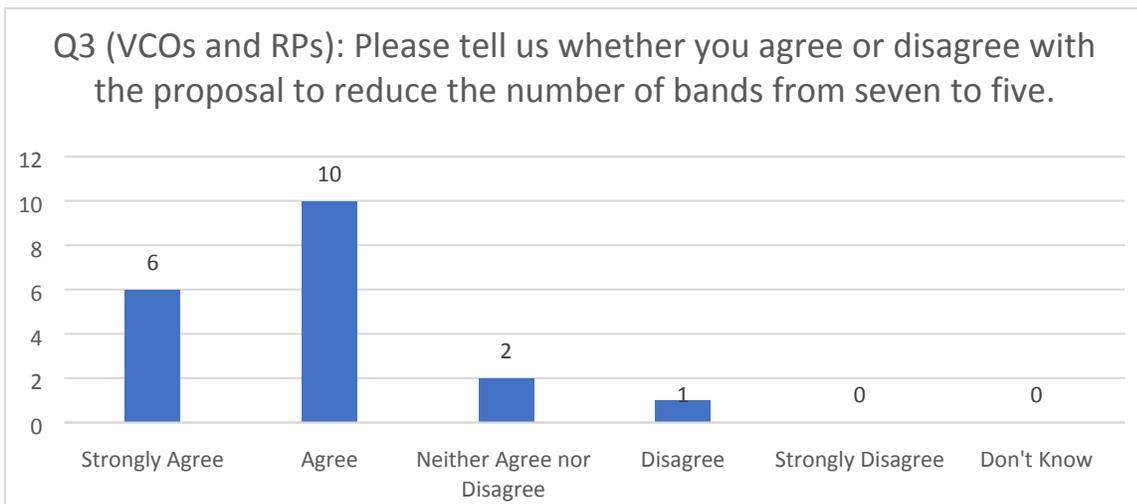
- Banding System
 - Multiple Housing Needs
 - Responses in this theme focused on how banding will be assessed amongst households with needs across different bands.
 - No Change Needed
 - Responses in this theme were happy with the system as it is. Some were worried that it would be difficult to capture complexity in reduced bands:
 - ***'I think it's very difficult to shoe horn people into housing into just 4 bands, each band would have such varying needs within it'***
 - Agreement with Reduction in Bands
 - Responses in this theme were positive about reducing the number of bands to three.
 - ***'It's a good idea to change the bands but being in priority banding already I'm hoping it isn't going to affect me too much as it's all ready hard to get a property'***
 - ***'I agree with this to simplify the process and understanding'.***
 - Impact on current applicants
 - A large number of respondents were concerned about how the changes to the banding system would affect those who are already on Homefinder.
 - ***'I don't completely disagree with reducing the number of bands but current banding status must be taken into consideration. I am not looking forward to having to provide repeat evidence that you already have on file to process my housing needs. I was told that my priority band would provide me with accommodation in approximately 18 months. I've already been waiting 11 months and this is now under threat with the reduced bandings. This is totally unfair after such an already extensive wait.'***
 - ***'By changing the level of priority I will be moved down, I currently live in a 2 bedroom house with my 15 year old sharing a bedroom with his 10 year old and 8 month sister. Please tell me how that is morally right?'***

The following graph shows the relative prevalence of these themes:



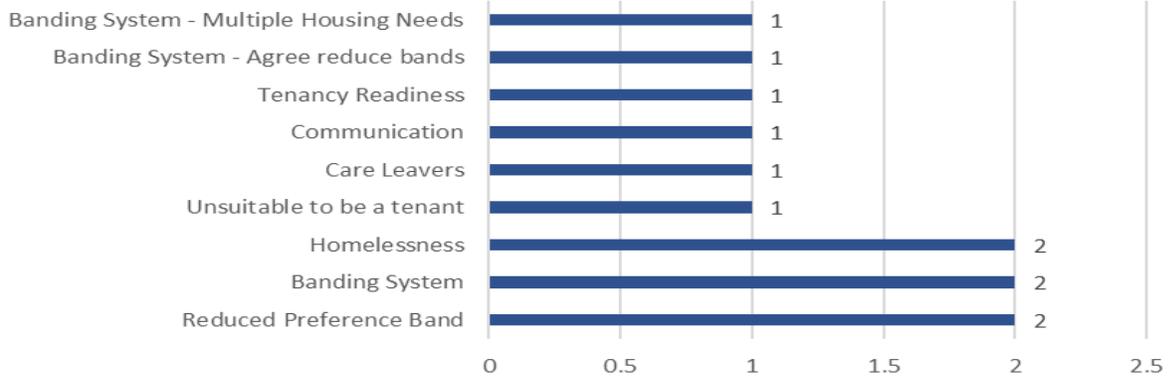
F. Question Three – Changing the banding system - VCOs and RPs Responses

A total of 19 responded to question three, of whom 84% indicated Strongly Agree or Agree. By way of contrast, 5% Disagree. No 'strongly disagree' responses were received. The graph below details the number of responses in full.



Again, in comparison with the General Public, the VCOs and RPs are more positive towards the proposal. VCOs and RPs in comments asked a number of clarificatory questions on different groups of people accessing Homefinder. Particular concern was expressed with regard to those who are leaving care, prison or hospital, as well as those who are owed HRA duty. VCOs and RPs were keen to understand how these groups could be prevented from falling into the Reduced Preference Band. There was also concern to do with a 'category overlap' where there was confusion as to which bands and duties applied to individual cases. Nonetheless, broadly, VCOs and RPs remained supportive of the proposal.

Q3: If you disagree with changing the number of bands or the level of priority given to different applicant groups, please tell us why.



Question Four – The Reduced Preference Band

This question was concerned with the proposal to introduce a reduced preference band for those who have unacceptable behaviour or rent arrears, or those who have refused three offers of accommodation or have not actively bid on the Homefinder system. Respondents to this question were provided with the same options to respond as in previous questions.

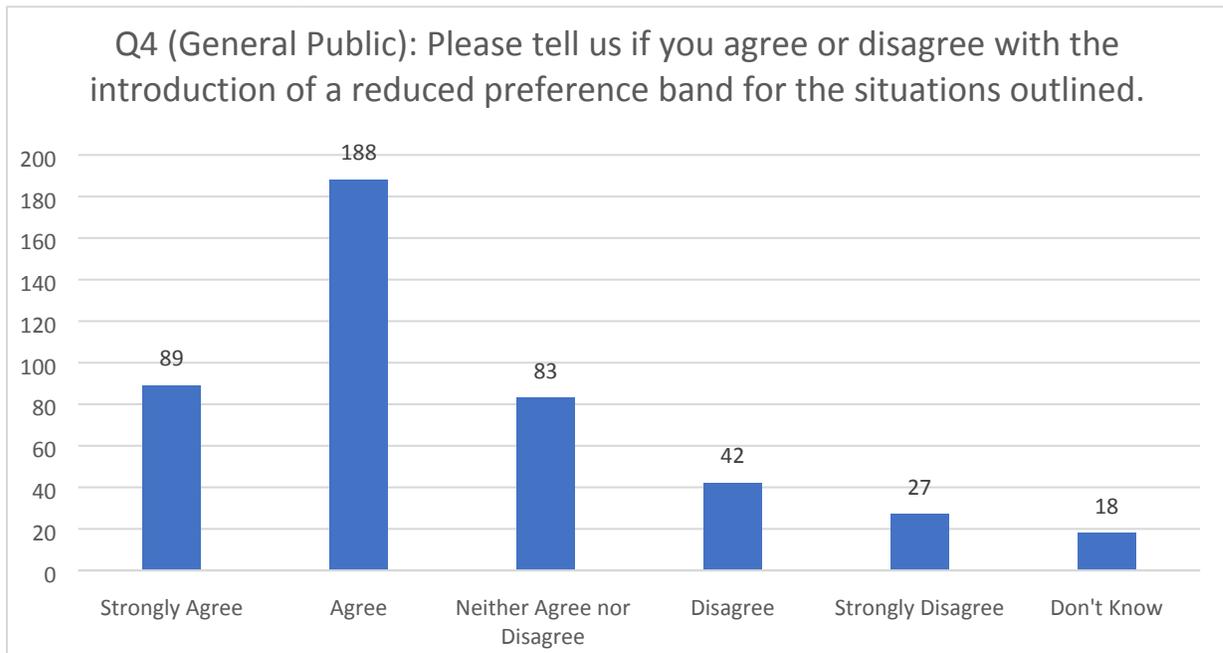
G. Question Four - Reduced Preference Band – General Public Responses

In total, 447 members of the general public chose to respond, amongst whom:

- 62% indicated either Strongly Agree or Agree
- 15.4% indicated either Strongly Disagree or Disagree

The following chart details the numbers of those who indicated each level of agreement to the proposal.

Question Four: Summary of Theme Analysis



- There were a number of worries associated with the idea of unsuitable tenants. Some of these surrounded the issue of rent arrears, which many worried were common struggles.
- Other concerns were related to offers being refused due to unsuitability. Respondents were worried that houses were often poorly described.
- Respondents were worried about active bidding leading to people bidding on homes in areas which are far from schools and support networks.

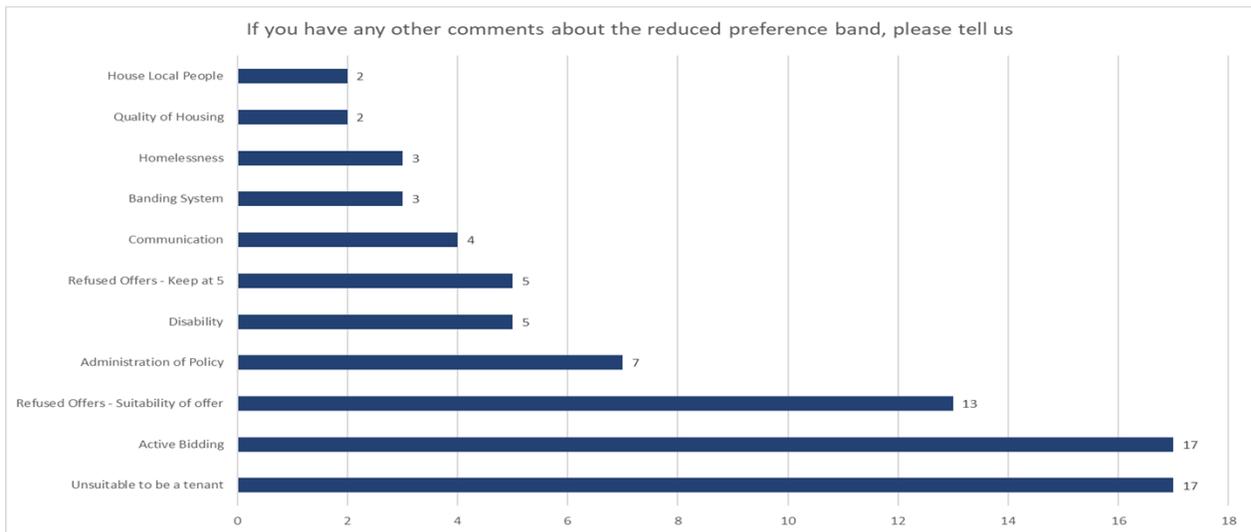
Question Four: Theme Analysis

The following themes were most prevalent in the free-text responses to this question:

- Unsuitable to be a tenant
 - A number of respondents had worries relating to assessing people as being unsuitable tenants. Some of these worries surrounded the question of rent arrears:
 - ***'Just because someone is in a week or two in arrears does not mean they are not a good tennent. I find myself sometimes in arrears because I physically can not get out of the house for a long period of time or I am to scared to be in the house but to scared to leave it either.'***
 - ***'Some reasons for rent arrears are not the tenants fault so this again is unfair'***
 - However, other respondents were more positive about this proposal:
 - ***'I think this is fair enough. A lot of people would love to be able to be house by their local council so if someone is not behaving correctly and using the system appropriately then they should be given a lower band.'***
 - ***'as long as people are being told why and being given help to leave then should work fine'***
- Active Bidding
 - Some respondents were concerned that those who are not actively bidding might be those who are struggling with health issues:
 - ***'Not actively bidding may have many reasons ie disability, no access to internet.'***
 - Others were concerned that a requirement to actively bid might lead some to bid on properties that were unsuitable or not in an area to their liking:
 - ***'i will only bid for houses where i want to live and not dumped in areas where its rough and not suitable for my family'***
- Refused Offers – Suitability of Offer
 - Similarly to the previous theme, a number of respondents were concerned about the suitability of housing offered. Some were concerned that housing was often offered in places far from family, schools and support networks:
 - ***'Your offers are often ludicrous and unsuitable - families that need support being offered homes away from people they know that help or forcing children to change schools, often the schools in the new area have no space so have to travel miles.'***
 - Others were concerned that often offers are refused because it is not always apparent when bidding what the quality or nature of the house offered is until a physical visit:
 - ***'Until a property is actually viewed there is no real way of knowing if it is suitable for the applicant. By making applicants have a penalty for not bidding you are encouraging false bids just to remain active. And punishing those who have felt forced to bid on something they know is not suitable but they are offered it.'***
- Disability

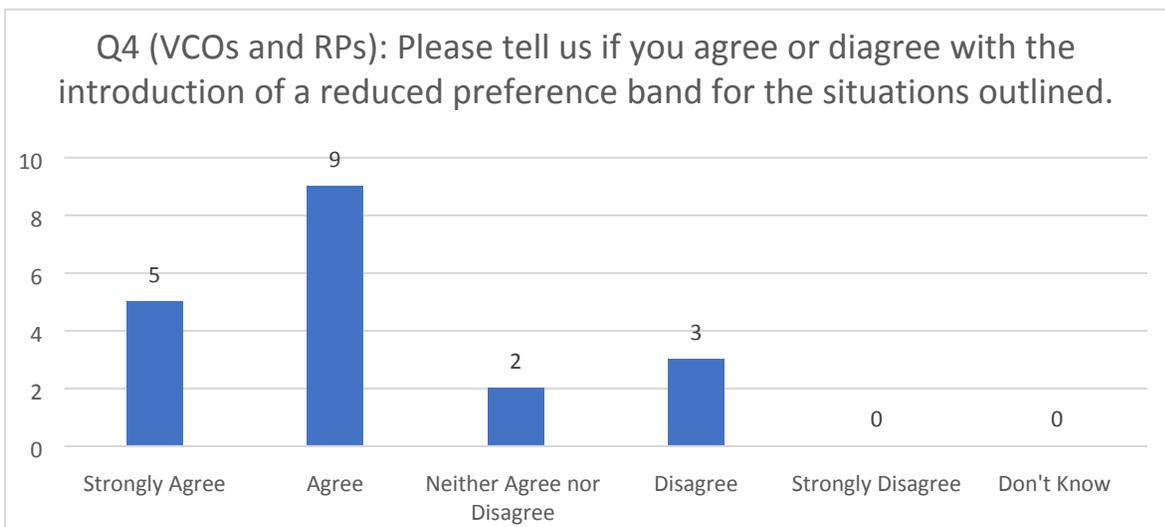
- A number of respondents were concerned about whether homes offered would be suitable for their disabilities. There was also a focus on mental health:
 - ***'If you have mental health issues A flat/ bedsit would suit their physical environment but may not be suitable for their well being /mental health. Could feel unsafe and vulnerable in a closed /built up environment'***

The following chart shows the relative prevalence of the identified themes:



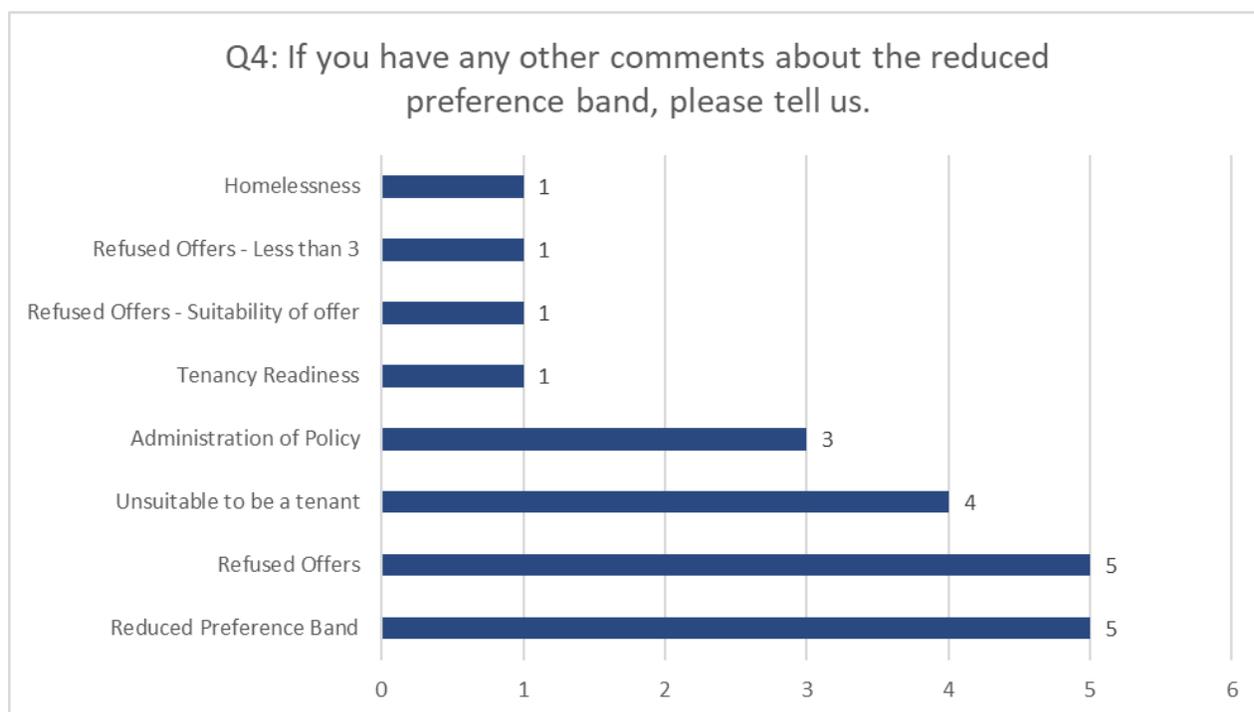
H. Question Four – Reduced Preference Band - VCOs and RPs Responses

A total of 19 responded to question four, of whom 74% indicated Strongly Agree or Agree. By way of contrast, 16% Disagree. No 'strongly disagree' responses were received. The graph below details the number of responses in full.



In comparison with the General Public, the VCOs and RPs are more positive towards the proposal in general. In both groups, the respondents are more likely to 'agree' than 'strongly agree' with

the proposal. But note, that comparing the two groups (General Public and Organisations) like by like can be difficult as there is a vast difference in the number of respondents within each group.



Comments received

- ***‘Agreed that the reduced preference will ensure that people take seriously their bidding and if refuse suitable properties then they are showing they are clearly not in housing need. There is a need to manage the expectations of those on the list. For those ‘unsuitable to tenant’ there would need to be a clear path for them to follow to show them how they could become tenancy ready’.***
- ***‘This could discriminate against people who previously got into debts that were beyond their real control.e.g. mental health issues, partner issues, scams’.***
- ***‘Coventry CA supports the addition of this banding and believes identifying early those likely to be ‘skipped’ at the latter stages of the bidding process and giving them the opportunity to remedy perceived barriers to tenancy readiness, will save time and a degree of frustration for all concerned; ensuring properties are allocated to suitable service users more efficiently. We believe the key to making this new banding a success is for all to view it as a temporary placement dependent on those within it working to exit from it. We believe it will act as a spur to some to work to improve their circumstances and notify Homefinder of relevant changes in their circumstances’.***

Question Five: - Bidding Cycle

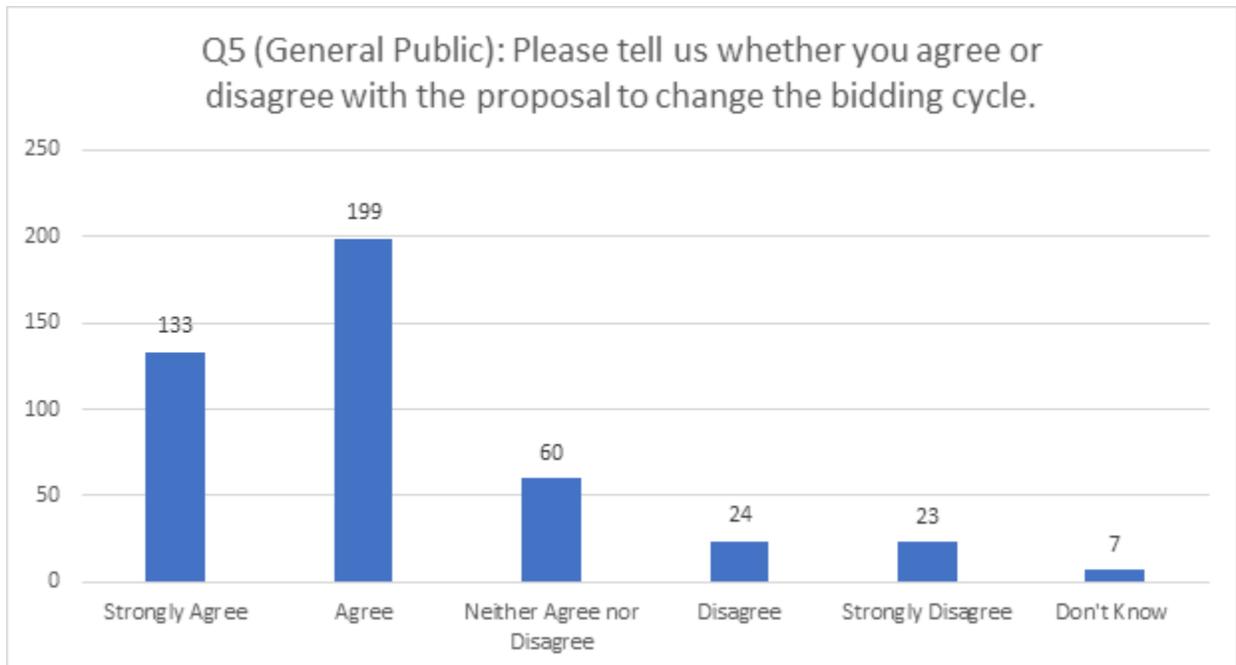
This question was concerned with the proposal to change the 'bidding cycle' to enable properties to be advertised on any day. People will have 7 calendar days to bid for a property. Currently there is a static bidding cycle from midnight (00.00am) on Thursday morning to the following Tuesday night (11.59am). Respondents to this question were provided the same options to respond as in previous questions.

I. Question Five – Bidding Cycle - General Public Responses

In total, 446 members of the general public chose to respond, amongst whom:

- 74% indicated either Strongly Agree or Agree
- 7% indicated either Strongly Disagree or Disagree

The following chart details the numbers of those who indicated each level of agreement to the proposal.



Question Five: Summary of Theme Analysis

- Many respondents were supportive of the changes to the bidding cycle since they felt that it was a fairer system which would be easier for people to use.
- A number of respondents were concerned about how IT access problems might make it difficult for people to access the bidding system.

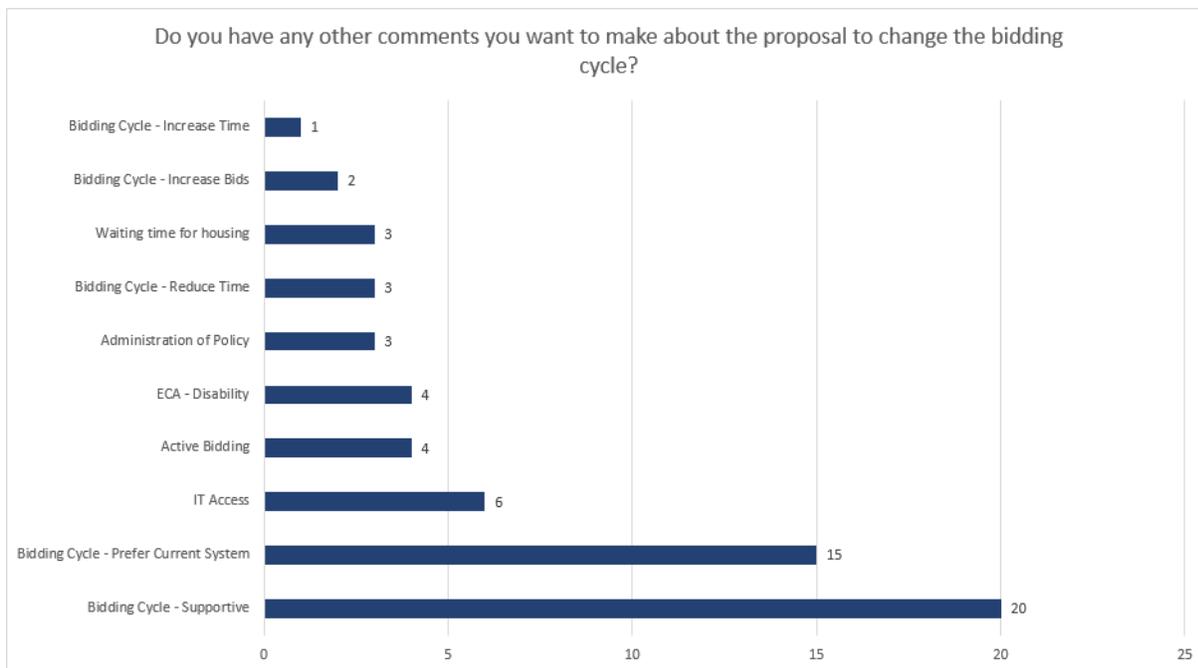
- Some respondents felt that the current system is familiar and that some people may find the new system more difficult.

Question Five: Theme Analysis

The following themes were prevalent in the free-text responses to this question:

- Bidding Cycle
 - Responses focused on the bidding cycle largely fell into one of five themes which will be explored more deeply later:
 - Increased Time
 - Increased Bids
 - Reduced Time
 - Prefer Current System
- IT Access
 - Many felt that having an online system is much simpler but were still concerned about those who have limited or no access to the internet. And worried that it could specifically affect those with learning disabilities.
 - ***“Please take into account that not everyone can get onto the internet everyday to check for new houses being put up! I think the way you do it now fits more people so if they only able to get to the internet once a week they are seeing all the properties available that week so they don’t miss out! If u put new house up daily for the week it will not be fair on them less able people! No change needed here! New property to be put on the Thursday and kept till Tuesday deadline works better for everyone”***
- Active Bidding
- ECA – Disability
 - It was felt that changing from the current system can impact on those more vulnerable with disabilities
 - ***“Is it only online? What about those without access to internet or disability who can’t use it. Is there a phone number too? Does disability criteria include those with learning disabilities?”***
- Administration of Policy
- Waiting time for housing
 - Respondents hope that this change will mean a quicker letting process and a reduction in queues.
 - ***“This will speed up the letting process and shorten queues for available properties”***

The following graph shows the relative prevalence of these themes:

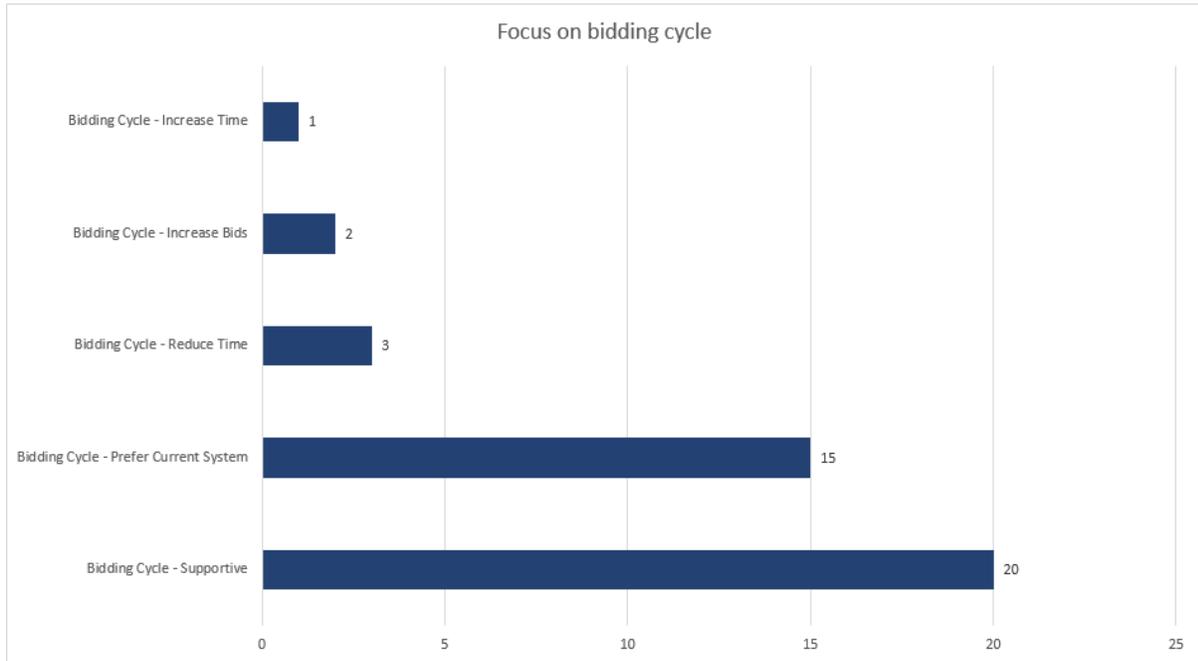


As previously mentioned, there were several comments which were focused on the bidding cycle

- Bidding Cycle – Supportive
 - Many of the respondents were supportive of the new proposal and felt that it's a much fairer process that will ease the complicated current system for many. Allowing people more time to think about bidding on properties which are more suitable. And removing the need of having to wait until midnight to view new properties and get better chances on bidding.
 - ***“The chance to bid almost all the time and have more properties coming up would be good. When you are desperate and you wait till midnight on Wednesday evening, log in and check and see nothing suitable then having to wait a week to try again is heartbreaking when you are in a dire situation.”***
- Bidding Cycle - Prefer Current System
 - Majority of the responses within this theme were concerned that changing the current bidding cycle would lead to confusion and have a greater impact on those which are more vulnerable or limited access to the internet.
 - ***“It is better to stick with the current system, so it's not constantly updating. People with the inability to cope with these types of changes, due to mental health issues, could get confused & therefore be disadvantaged. You would be discriminating against them.”***
- Bidding Cycle – Reduce Time
 - Respondents felt that the current cycle is too long and that those who are actively looking for social housing would bid when the bidding cycle opens.
 - ***“Give people less time to bid, if they need a property that bad then they will make sure it gets done within the time frame.”***
- Bidding Cycle – Increase Bids

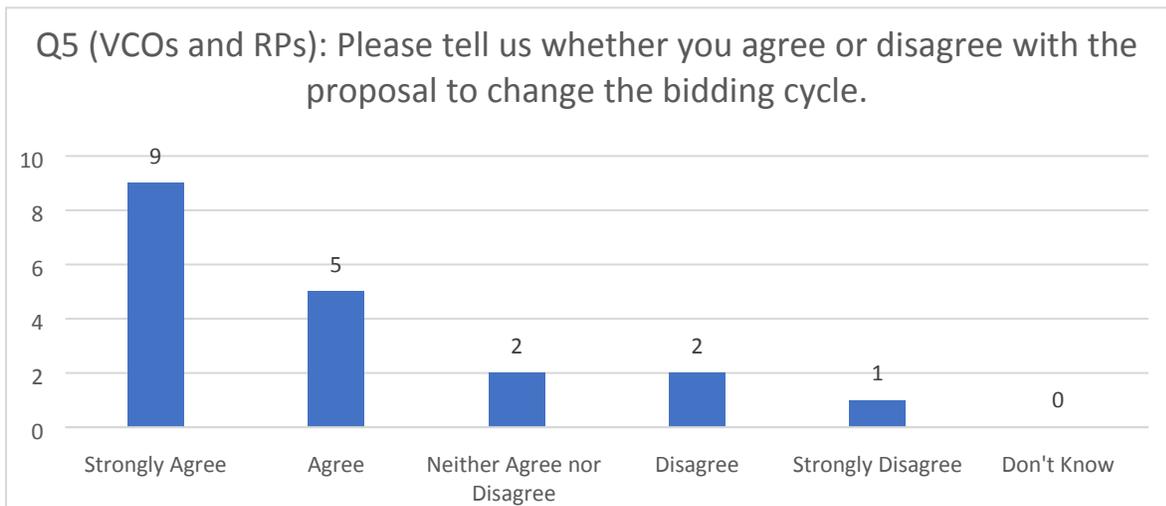
- Responses within this theme were positive about being allowed to increase the number of property bids.
- Bidding Cycle – Increase Time
 - This theme consists of the opinion that more time should be given to enable people to complete official documentation.

The following graph shows the relative prevalence of these themes:



J. Question Five – Bidding cycle - VCOs and RPs Responses

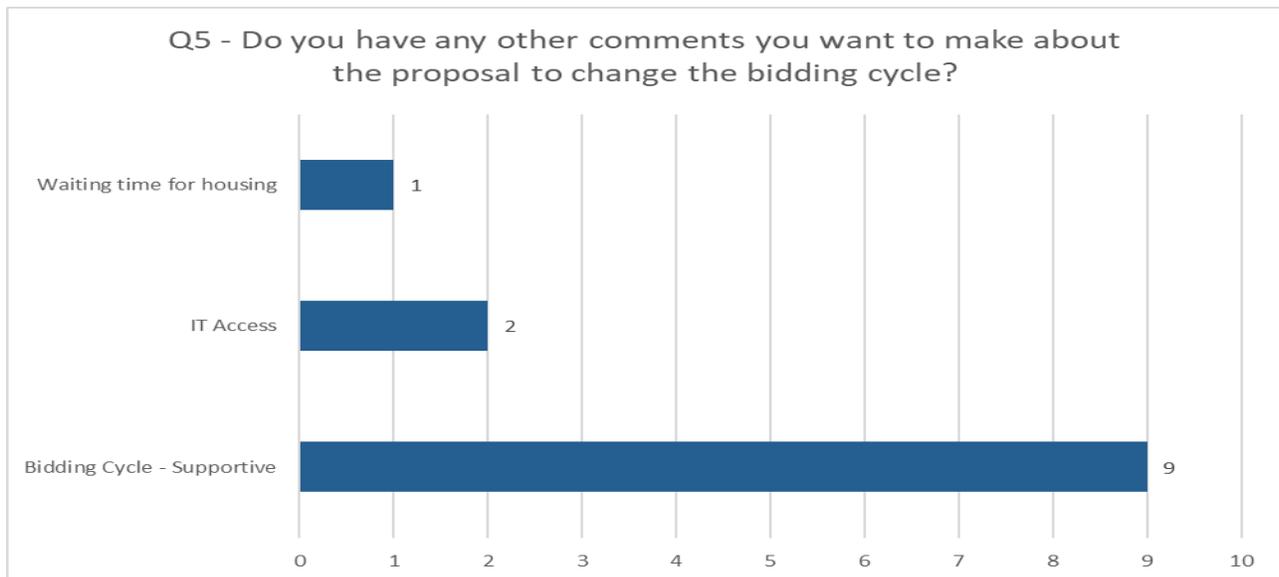
A total of 19 responded to question five, of whom 74% indicated Strongly Agree or Agree. By way of contrast, 16% Disagree. No 'strongly disagree' responses were received. The graph below details the number of responses in full.



In comparison with the General Public, the VCOs and RPs are more positive towards the proposal in general. The General Public are more likely to 'agree' whilst the VCOs and RPs were more likely to 'strongly agree'.

The themes from VCO and RP comments were mostly affirmations of support which spoke about different ways in which the new system would be beneficial. One response, however, did highlight how the proposed change would negatively affect those who did not have good access to the Internet.

- ***'We did note that the proposed change could impact negatively on those applicants without daily internet access, as they may miss new properties as they appear'***



Question Six: - Number of refused offers

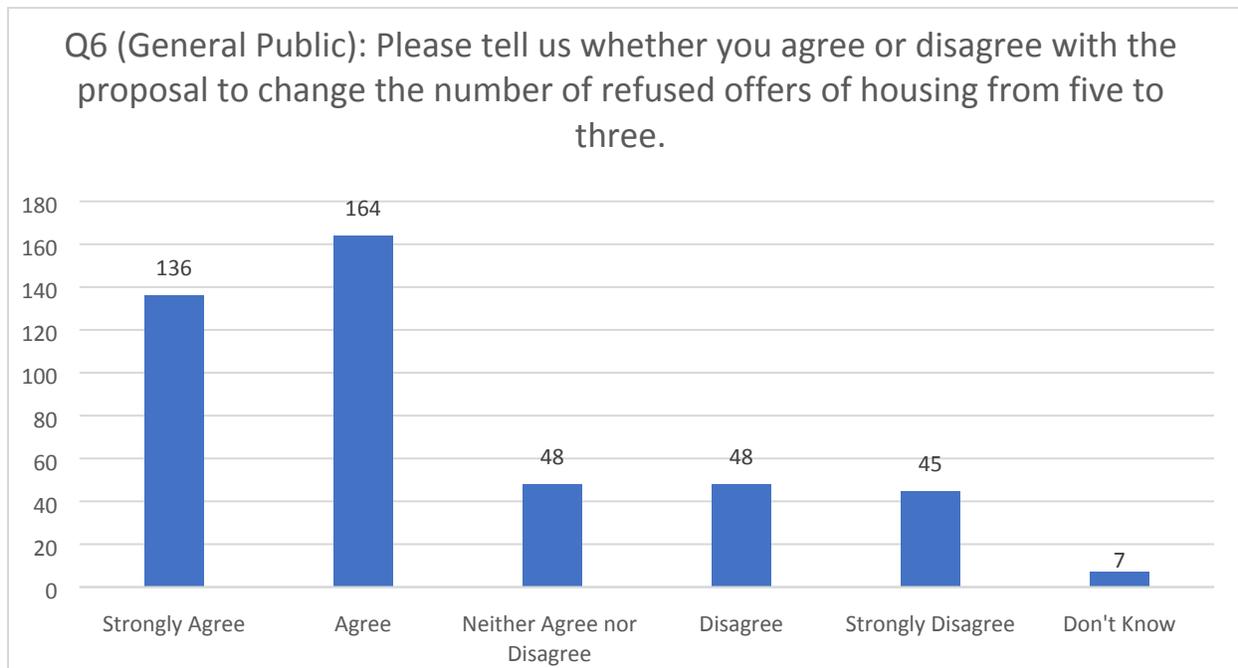
This question was concerned with the proposal to change the number of refused housing offers from the current number of five to a proposed three. Respondents were provided with the same options to respond as in previous questions.

K. Question Six – Number of refused offers - General Public Responses

A total of 448 people responded to this question, of whom:

- 67% indicated either Strongly Agree or Agree
- 20.7% indicated either Strongly Disagree or Disagree

The graph below shows the total count of respondents indicating each level of agreement:

**Question Six: Summary of Theme Analysis**

- As was the case for question four, a large theme was to do with the suitability of offers made, particularly when housing was poorly described on the Homefinder system.
- Respondents were generally supportive of the proposals since they felt that it would result in reduced waiting times.
- Some respondents, however, felt that reducing the number of refusals might lead to further pressure on applicants.

Question Six: Theme Analysis

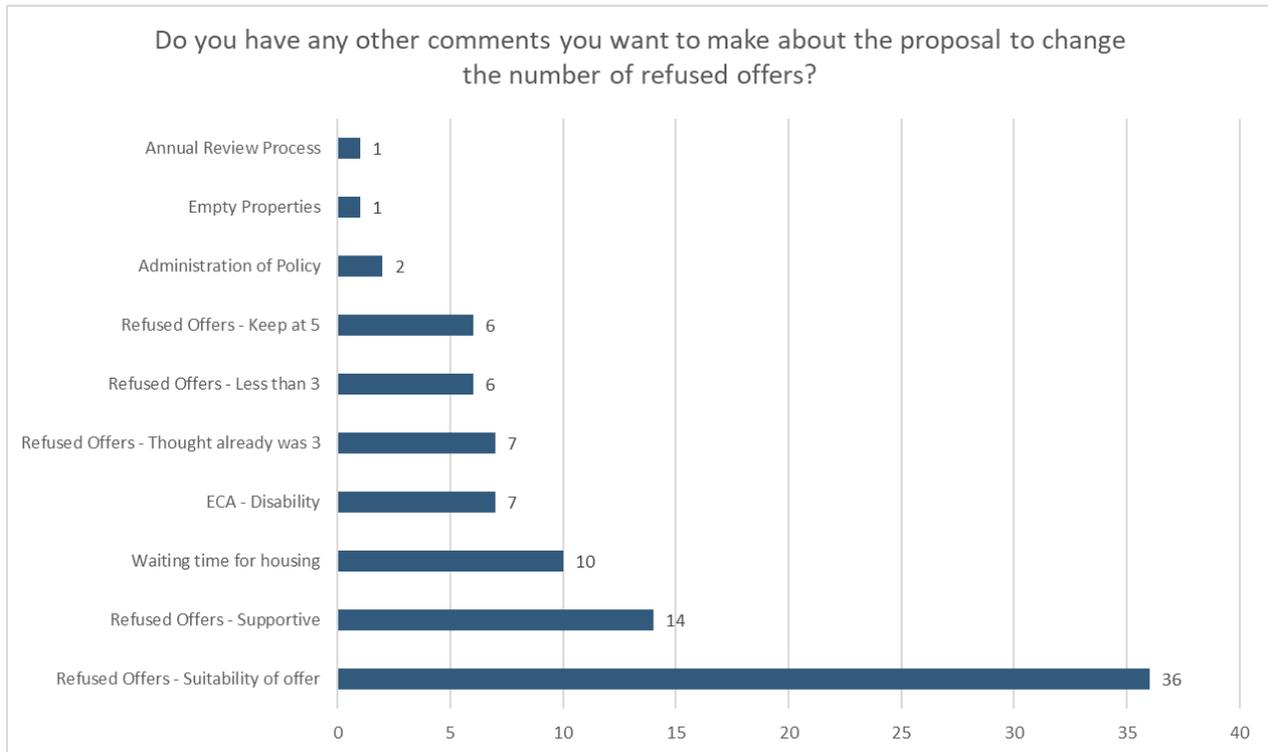
The following themes were prevalent in the free-text responses on this proposal:

- Refused Offers – Suitability of Offer

- As was the case in the discussion of question four, a large number of respondents expressed a worry related to the suitability of offers made on Homefinder. For some, this was related to poorly described properties:
 - ***'I have been to an 'adapted flat' only to find it is full of steps, one to get in, a dozen in the garden, on to get down from the living room to the hallway. Houses are not transparent. There are no pictures, no details.'***
- Others expressed that individuals have their own reasons for refusal which are particular to their own circumstances:
 - ***'People have reasons for declining properties, although you may not see it relevant to them it is important that they don't live in a specific area due to work and school, also if they have had problems in the area before.'***
- Refused Offers – Supportive
 - A large number of people were supportive of the reduction in the number of refused offers:
 - ***'Good idea, if they genuinely need housing they should be prepared to accept anything that is offered as long as it is reasonable'***
- Waiting time for housing
 - The majority of respondents were in favour of the proposals since they felt that it would lead to a reduction in the waiting times for housing:
 - ***'Reducing the offers made will reduce the days houses are left unavailable. It will give others the opportunity to be housed quicker hopefully.'***
 - However, one respondent feared that it would not lead to a reduction in waiting times:
 - ***'Changing the number of refused offers will not reduce the time that properties will be left empty. It will only reduce the number of valid applications on the housing list. Applicants should be able to refuse any property they do not wish to live in, without restriction. What will reduce the time that properties are left empty is an automated refusal system, whereby refused properties are immediately offered to another applicant, of which there is no shortage. If a property is still left empty, the authority needs to ask themselves why nobody wants to live in it.'***
- Disability
 - Responses in this theme were also to do with questions of the suitability of offers made.
- Refused Offers – Thought already was three

- A number of respondents were supportive of the proposals because they thought that the number of refusals was already at three.
- Refused Offers – Less than three
 - Some respondents wished for stricter requirements.
- Refused Offers – Keep at five
 - Some respondents felt that reducing the number of refused offers might lead to an increase pressure and stress upon applicants:
 - ***‘Not sure the length of time a property stands empty will be reduced much Applicants will be will be under more pressure and more stressed and therefore more likely to make a wrong decision’***

The following graph details the relative prevalence of themes:



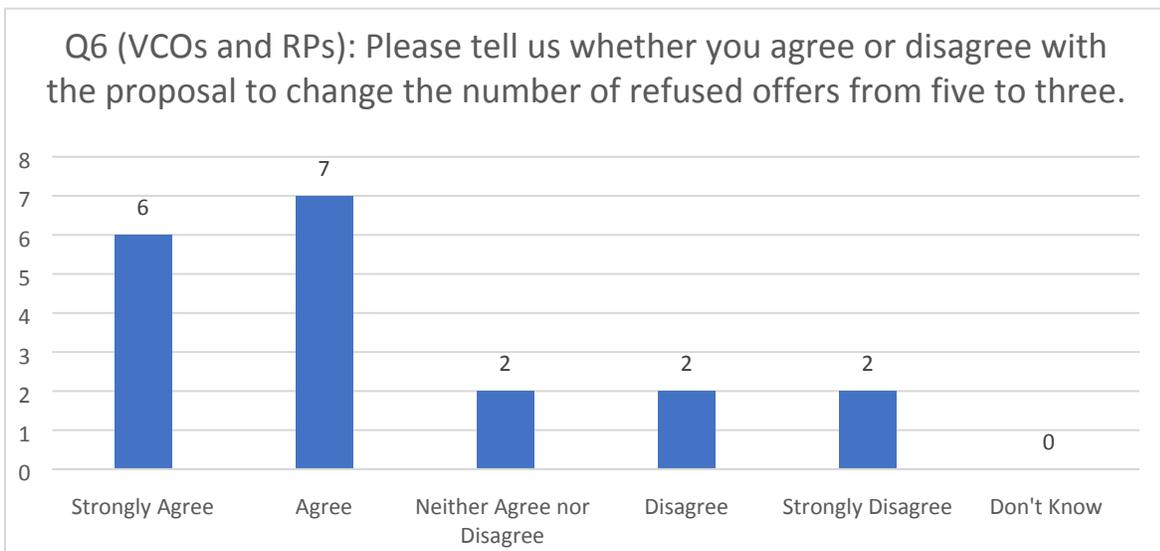


L. Question Six – Number of refused offers - VCOs and RPs Responses

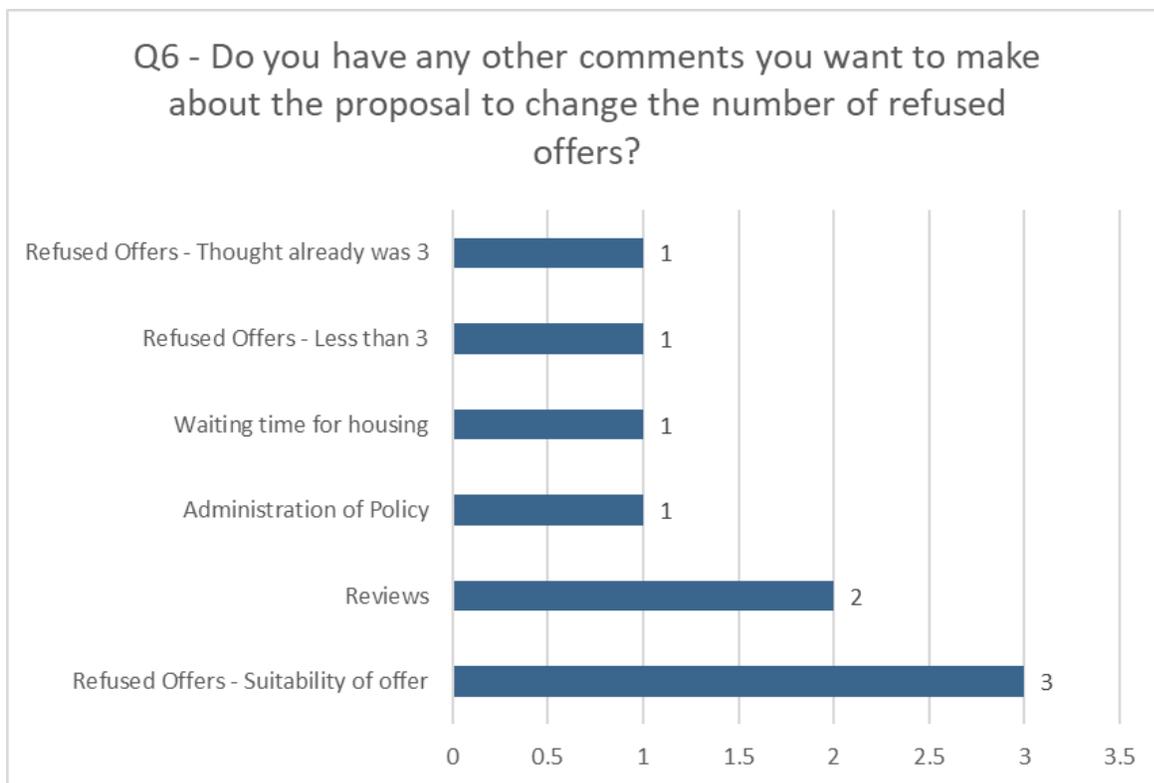
A total of 19 responded to question six, of whom:

- 68.4% indicated Strongly Agree or Agree.
- 10.5% indicated Disagree.
- No respondents indicated Strongly Disagree.

The graph below details the number of responses in full:



VCOs and RPs were supportive of the new proposal to reduce the number of refused offers but were keen that there might need to be more consideration of what constitutes a reasonable offer, as well as a strong appeal or review process which was viewed to be fair.



Comments Received

‘Citizen supports the proposed change to the bidding cycle. An any day advertising cycle means properties can be advertised at the earliest opportunity rather than landlords having to wait for a new cycle to begin. This also means that advertising cycles can close on any day meaning that the flow of shortlisting work to allocations teams is staggered. These changes should assist landlords to improve their relet performance. This change will also help to reduce inbuilt system waiting times for those in urgent housing need’.

‘Frontline workers welcomed the change of bidding cycle, moving away from all property bids ending on the same day each week. The current process can lead to clients who are unable to bid on a particular day missing all opportunities for an entire week. We did note that the proposed change could impact negatively on those applicants without daily internet access, as they may miss new properties as they appear. We recognised that changing the bidding cycle could make the bidding process more active for applicants, leading to more engagement with the process’.

Question Seven – Adapted properties

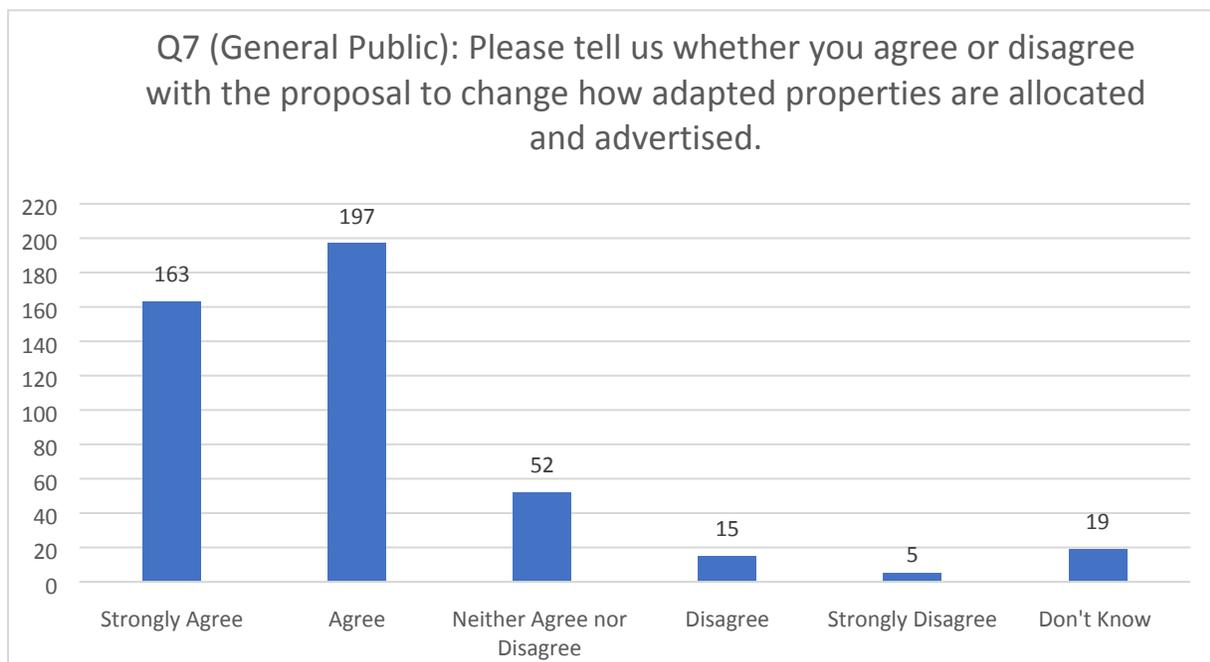
This question was to do with the proposal to start advertising adapted properties through Coventry Homefinder, rather than through a separate list. Respondents were able to indicate their level of agreement in the same way as in other questions.

M. Question Seven – Adapted Properties - General Public Responses

A total of 451 people responded to this question, amongst whom:

- 79.8% indicated they Strongly Agree or Agree
- 4.4% indicated that they Strongly Disagree or Disagree

The following graph shows the numbers of people who indicated each level of agreement.



Question Seven: Summary of Theme Analysis

- The majority of respondents were supportive of the change, though many were keen that it be carried out properly.
- Some were concerned that the change might lead to people inappropriately bidding for adapted properties.

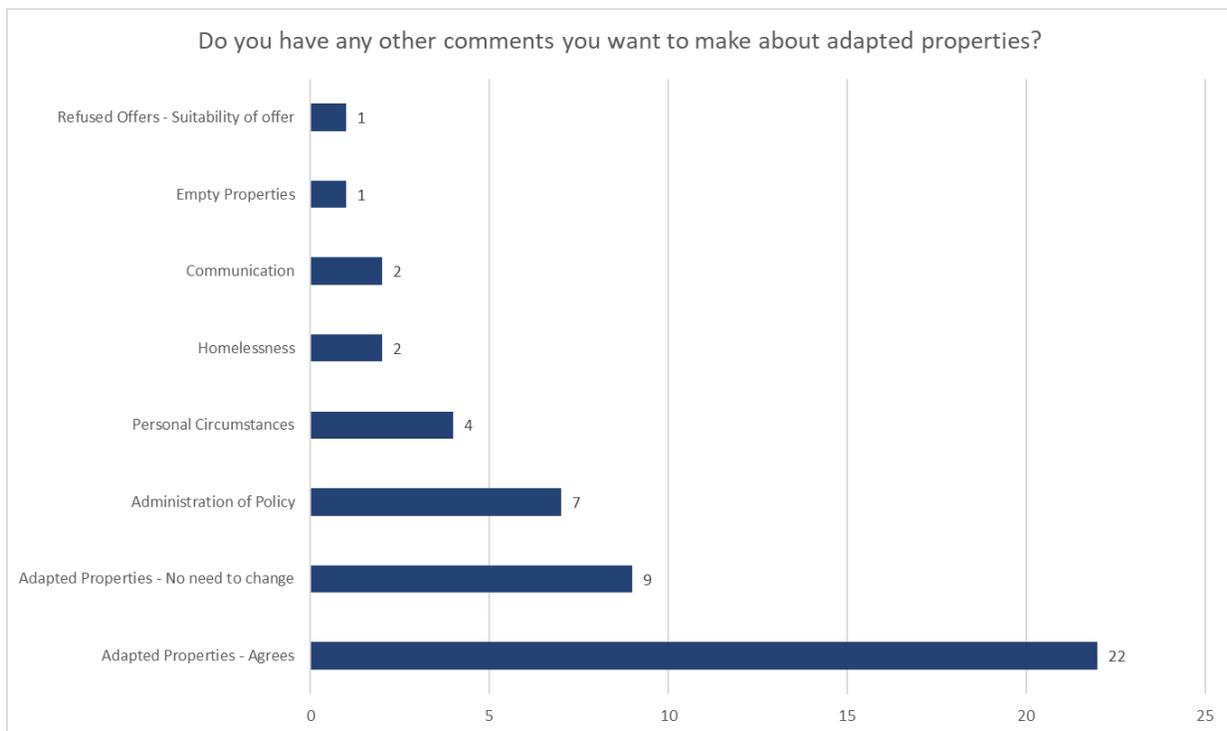
Question Seven: Theme Analysis

The following themes were prevalent in the free-text responses:

- Adapted Properties – Agrees
 - This theme was to do with those who agreed with the change and felt it would make accessing adapted properties easier.
- Adapted Properties – No need to change

- A number of people were worried that advertising adapted properties with other properties might lead people who do not require those adaptations to bid for them inappropriately.
 - **'This will probably mean everyone has access to appropriate housing but some people will misuse the system'**
 - **'Why do you show adopted property to me if I don't need it.'**
- Administration of Policy
 - Some respondents were supportive of the policy but were anxious that it be carried out properly.
 - **'Just make sure that the properties actually go to the people that genuinely need the adaptations. ... I think more of physical interview and assessments should be done.'**
- Homelessness
- Communication
- Empty Properties
- Refused Properties – Suitability of Offer

The following graph shows the relative prevalence of themes:



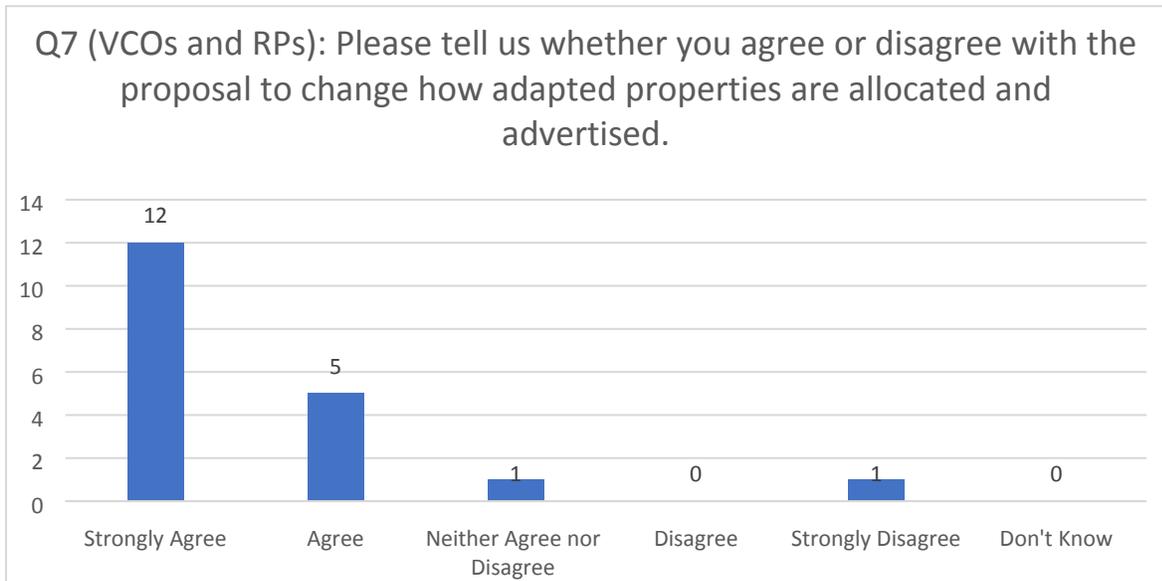
N. Question Seven – Adapted Properties - VCOs and RPs Responses

A total of 19 responded to question seven, of whom:

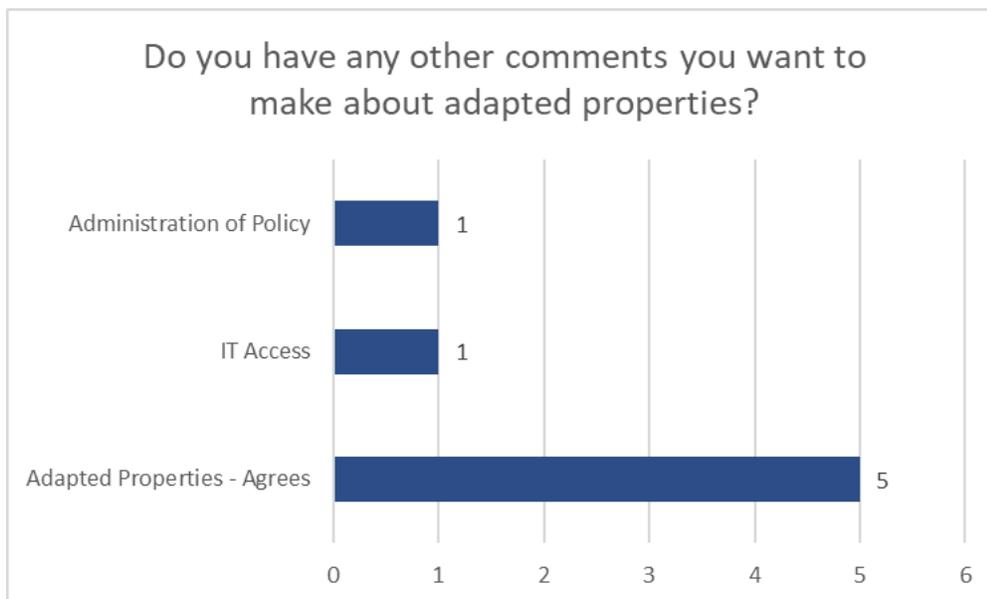
- 89.5% indicated Strongly Agree or Agree.

- 5.3% indicated Strongly Disagree.
- No respondents indicated Disagree.

The graph below details the number of responses in full:



This high level of agreement amongst VCOs and RPs correlates with the high level of agreement amongst the general public. The full-text responses were largely comments in support of the proposal, though one respondent did indicate that there may be a struggle related to those who have limited access to IT, as well as an opportunity where people could wrongly bid for adapted properties.



Question Eight – Application Process

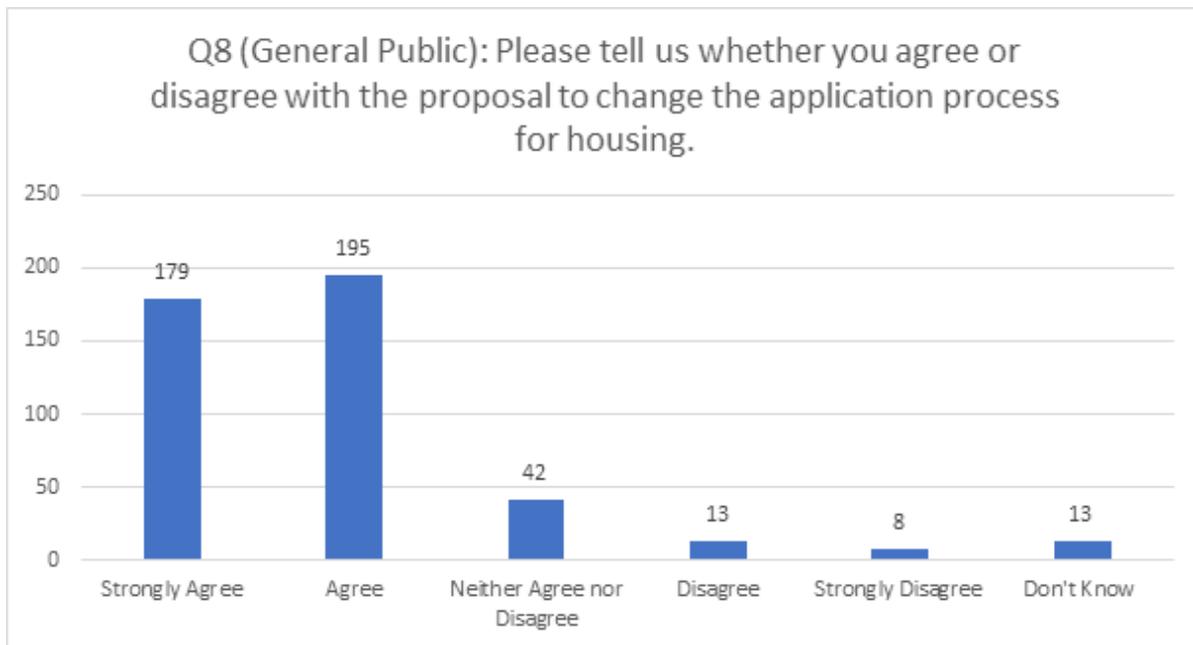
This question was concerned with the proposal to have one application process with one form instead of the current two (where people apply and ask for a priority banding separately). Everyone will have their housing needs assessed when they apply. Respondents to this question were provided the same options to respond as in previous questions.

O. Question Eight – Application Process – General Public Responses

In total, 450 members of the general public chose to respond, amongst whom:

- 83% indicated either Strongly Agree or Agree
- 5% indicated either Strongly Disagree or Disagree

The following chart details the numbers of those who indicated each level of agreement to the proposal.



Question Eight: Summary of Theme Analysis

In general, respondents indicated:

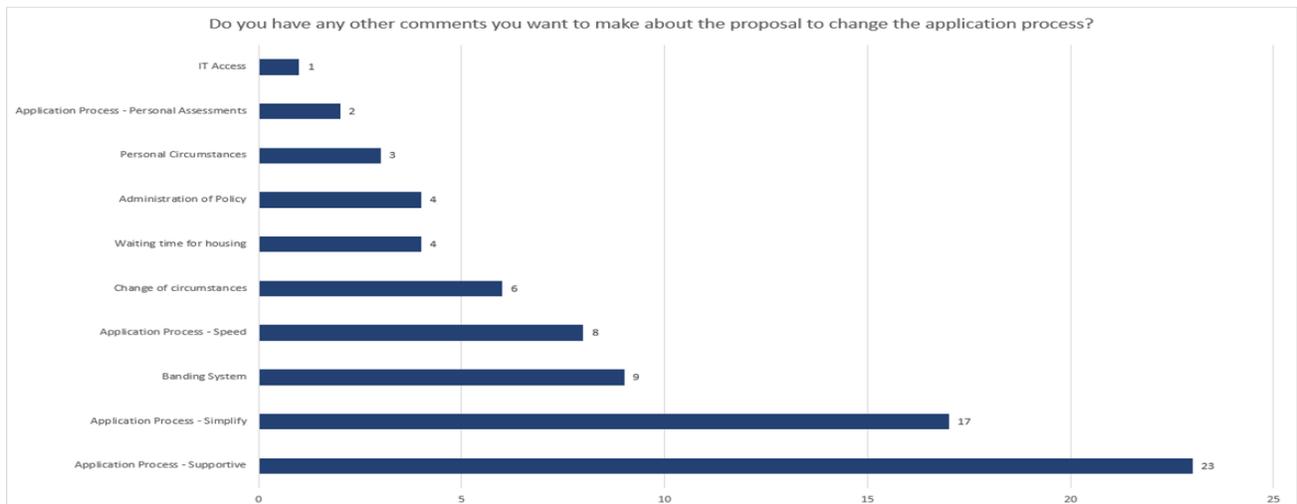
- Support of this change, as it will reduce the stress on people on having to complete two sets of forms;
- Be of benefit and impact vulnerable families
- Fairer and faster application process for all

Question Eight: Theme Analysis

The following themes were most prevalent in the free-text responses to this question:

- Application Process
 - Responses focused on the application process largely fell into one of three themes which will be explored more deeply later:
 - Speed
 - Simplify
 - Supportive
- Banding System
- Change of circumstances
 - Respondents hope that the new system will take into account any changes within people’s circumstances, as by having one form, this could be missed.
 - ***“If only circumstances change and then u update people’s band automatically then that’s fine as there will be people who’s circumstances may change over the years so banging of priority will change too... so u will need to have a system where it will update too”***
- Waiting time for housing
- Administration of Policy
 - The respondents hope that the new system will improve the whole process but weary on whether the administration system will ensure that they are up to speed with the clients’ housing needs and that banding will correspond with people’s circumstances.
 - ***“Common sense – such a long process at the minute. Should be a very in-depth form that takes into consideration everything that could affect someone’s housing situation. Domestic abuse/family breakdowns, infestations, problems with rented accommodation. DO NOT FORCE PEOPLE TO BECOME HOMELESS BEFORE YOU HELP, ASSES THEM AND TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION ALL FACTORS.”***

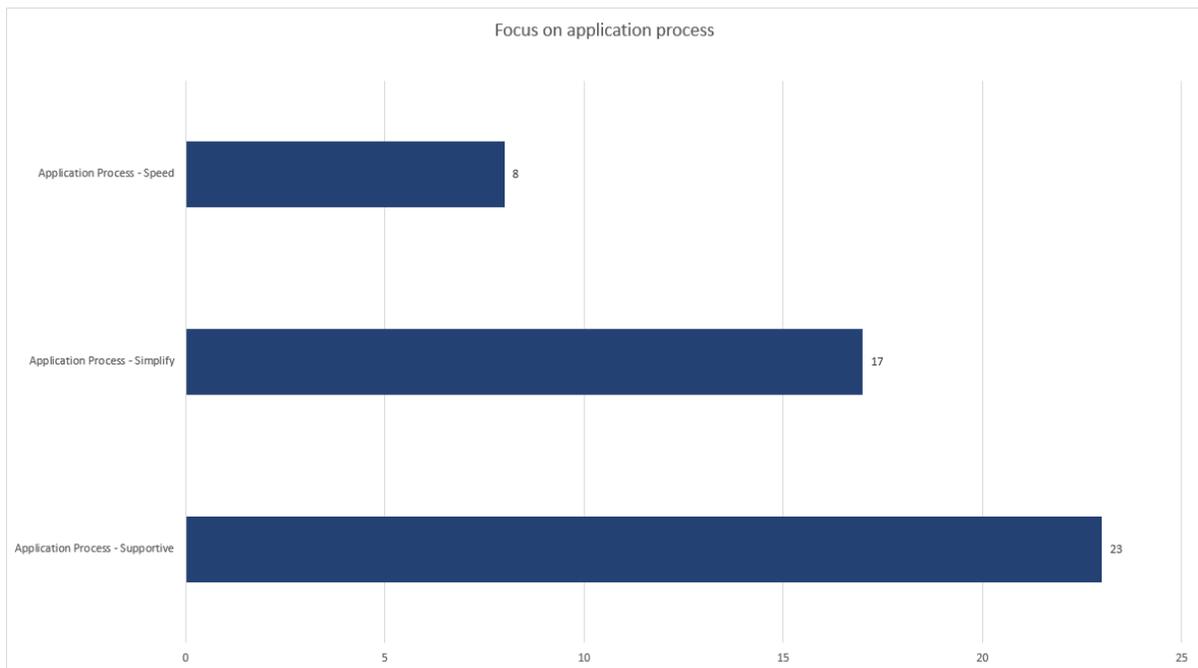
The following graph shows the relative prevalence of these themes:



As previously mentioned, there were several comments which were focused on the application process

- Application Process – Supportive
 - The majority are in support of this change as it will reduce the stress on people on having to complete two sets of forms. It will also reduce workload for the local authority as only one set of applications will need to be verified.
 - ***“This will be better than the current system where they have to complete 2 separate forms, which are not linked to each other. We cannot guarantee that applicants will only have one application as they can currently add themselves to their partners application and vice-versa.”***
- Application Process – Simplify
 - Responses within this theme felt very positive towards simplifying the process as it will benefit vulnerable families by getting them housed quicker and less delays.
 - ***“Less confusing for all, less chance for people to clog up the system hopefully be fairer one application form if found to be forging there application they are removed and not allowed to apply again for 10 years”***
- Application Process – Speed
 - Many responses within this theme believe it will be a great improvement to cut the banding decision time, and will be especially useful to those who are waiting on decision whilst living in hostels.
 - ***“Streamlining this would help with housing people more quickly, additional forms create extra unnecessary red tape – by creating extra work for staff and applicants and in-turn creates delays housing people”***

The following graph shows the relative prevalence of these themes:

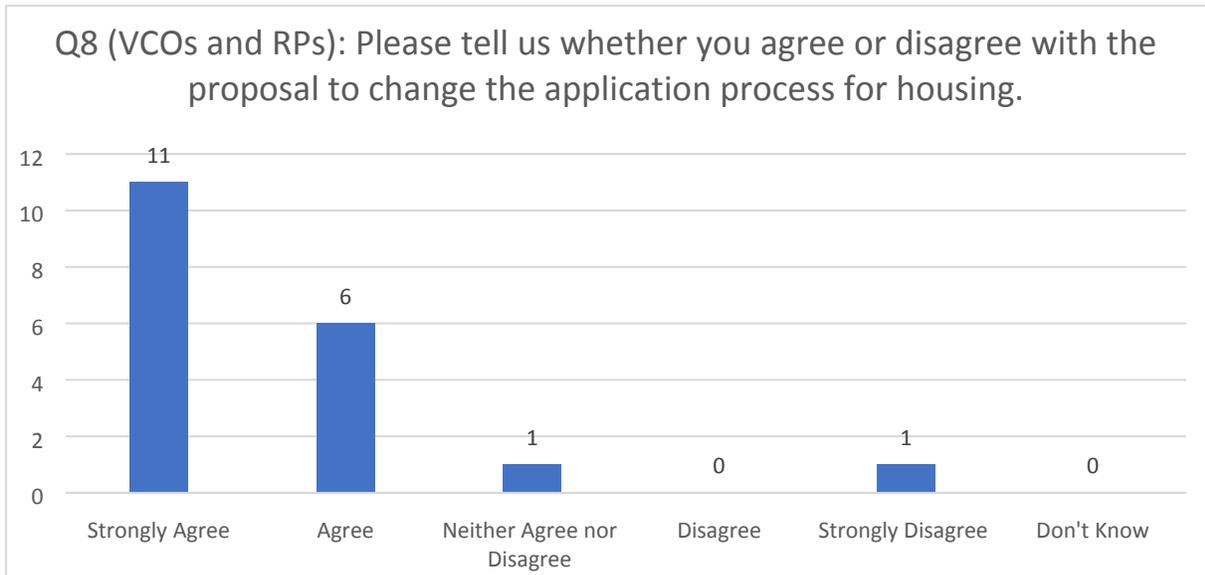


P. Question Eight – Application process - VCOs and RPs Responses

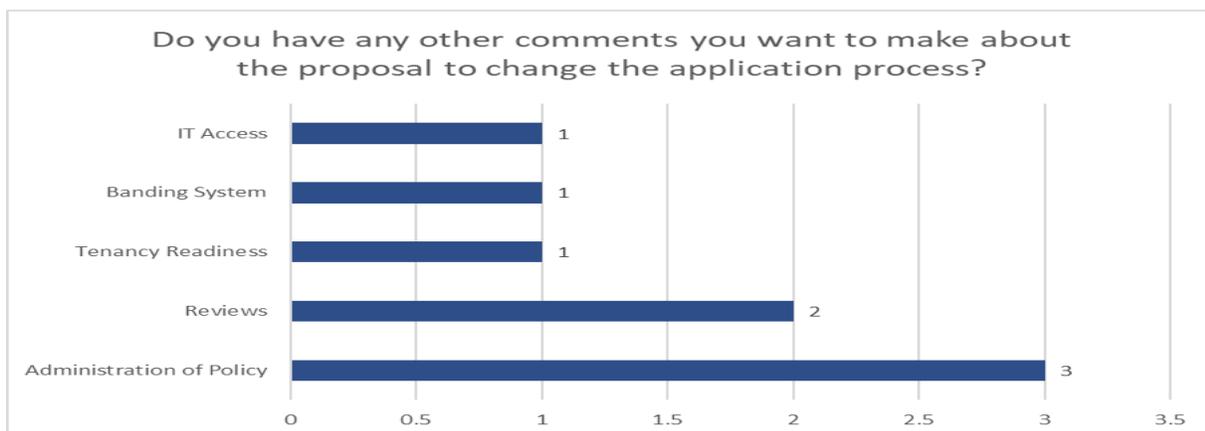
A total of 19 responded to question eight, of whom:

- 89.5% indicated Strongly Agree or Agree.
- 5.3% indicated Strongly Disagree.
- No respondents indicated Disagree.

The graph below details the number of responses in full:



VCOs and RPs, as with other questions, were therefore more supportive of the proposals. Full-text responses reveal that although VCOs and RPs are supportive of the proposals, they are concerned with the implementation of the policy. In particular, respondents expressed a wish for there to be assistance for people to complete their application if necessary, and that the application would be able to be completed over a reasonable timeframe which would give vulnerable applicants time to present evidence. Respondents were also keen that there be an opportunity for applications to be completed by those without IT access.



Question Nine – Annual Review Process

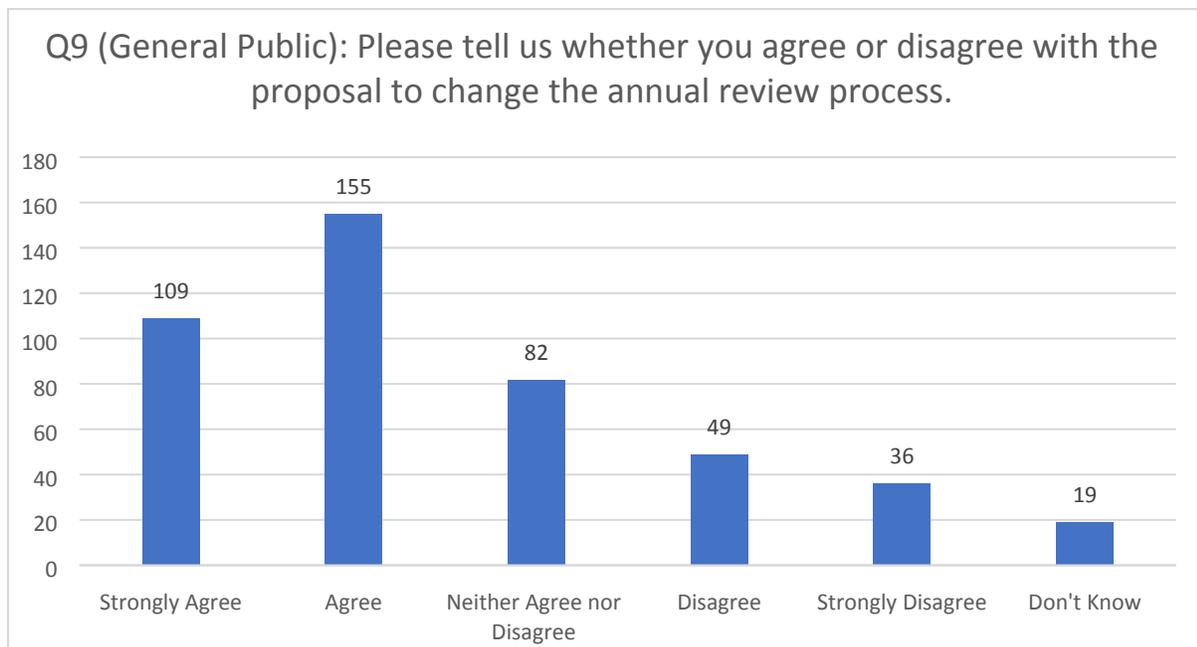
This question was concerned with the proposal to reduce the number of days people have to complete the annual review of their housing application before it is closed from 125 days to 28 days. As with other questions, respondents were able to indicate their level of agreement as either Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree or Don't Know.

Q. Question Nine – Annual review process - General Public Responses

A total of 450 people responded to the question, amongst whom:

- 58.6% indicated either Strongly Agree or Agree
- 18.9% indicated either Strongly Disagree or Disagree

The following chart details the number of respondents at each level of agreement.



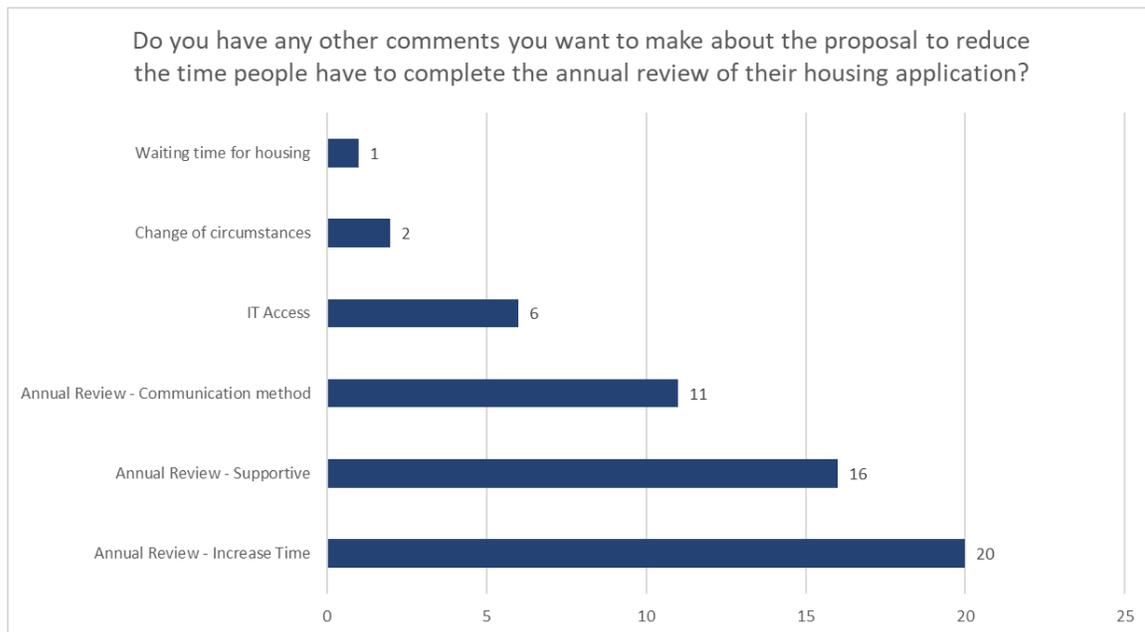
Question Nine: Theme Analysis

The following themes were prevalent in the free-text comments on the proposal to change the annual review process:

- Annual Review – Increase Time
 - The largest theme throughout the text responses was to do with a desire to increase the proposed annual review time. Most were supportive of a reduction from 125 days but felt that 28 days was too short.
 - *'I don't see this as fair maybe to 50/60 days'*
 - *'I think you should get 60 days rather than 28. I think its a reasonable compromise, as the current review is along time.'*
- Annual Review – Supportive

- Another theme was supportive of the reduction to 28 days, though some respondents thought that reminders and allowances for exceptional circumstances would be useful.
 - ***‘Agree but people need to be sent a reminder that it needs completing’***
 - ***‘People are informed there form needs re newing, shouldn’t need to take so long except in certain situations like hospitalisation’***
- Annual Review – Communication Method
 - This theme surrounded the need to help people in the renewal process through better communication and messaging.
 - ***‘May be an idea that applicants are either emailed or text to inform them that their application needs to be reviewed?’***
- IT Access
 - A number of respondents were concerned that not all applicants might have access to the internet:
 - ***‘Again not every one can have access to the internet . Postal contacts for those who cannot use the present method many have to wait for a friend organic member to receive the reminder’***
- Change of Circumstances
- Waiting time for housing

The following graph details the relative prevalence of themes in the free-text responses:

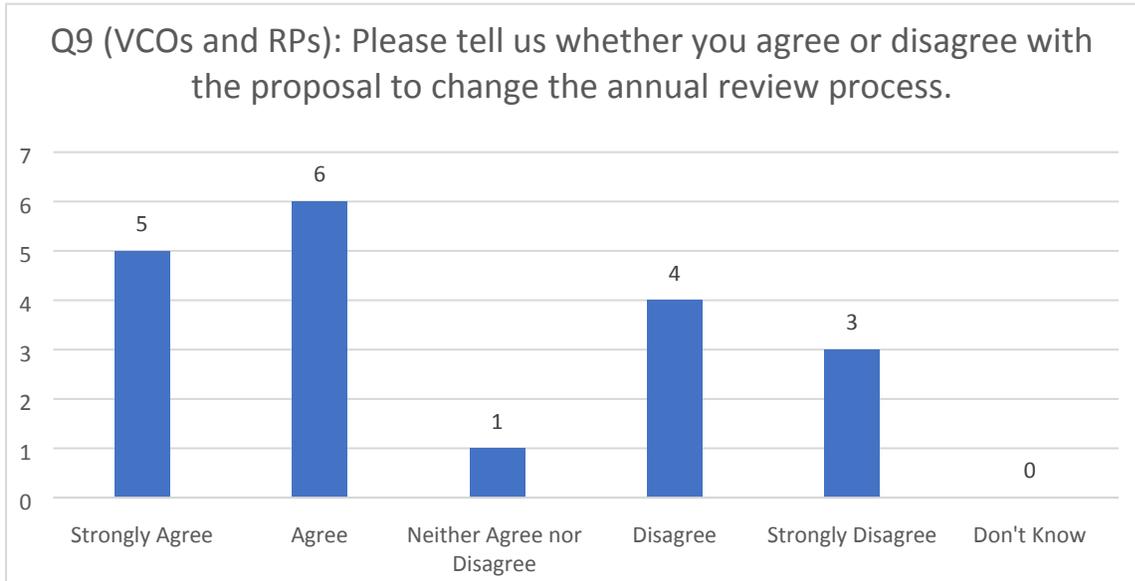


R. Question Nine – Annual review process - VCOs and RPs Responses

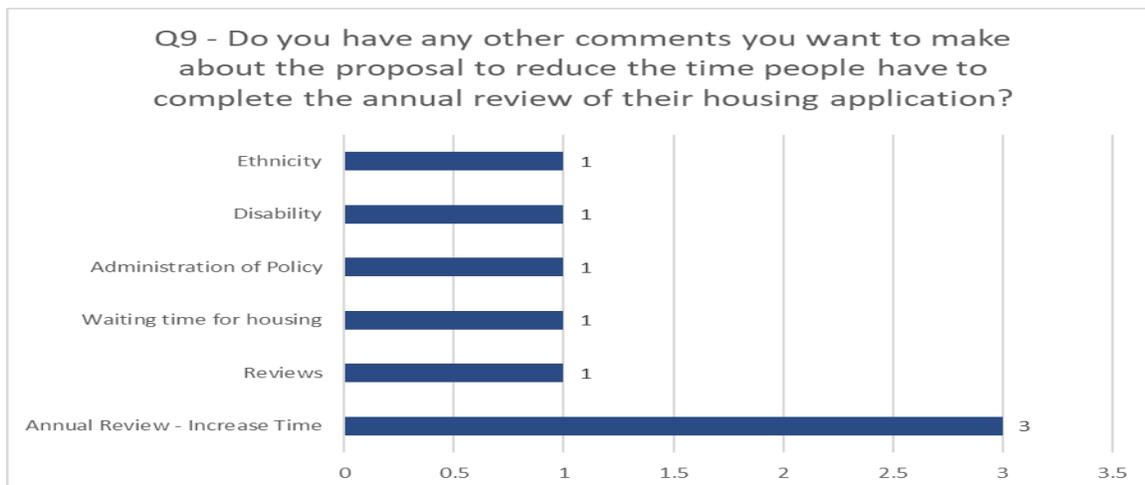
A total of 19 responded to question nine, of whom:

- 58% indicated Strongly Agree or Agree.
- 37% indicated Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

The graph below details the number of responses in full:



Whilst VCOs and RPs were in general supportive of this proposal, a number of full-text responses indicated that they would be in favour of a more modest reduction in timeframe for the annual review process. The time frame of 50 or 60 days was floated by some respondents. There was also a concern that for those for whom English is not a first language, additional assistance might need to be sought which might take a longer timeframe than 28 days.



Question Ten: - Equalities

The final question of the consultation asked respondents whether they felt that the proposals could have any impact upon different groups of people. Unlike previous questions, this question did not ask respondents to indicate their level of agreement to a specific proposal. Respondents were prompted to consider the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race/ethnicity, religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

S. Question 10 - Equalities

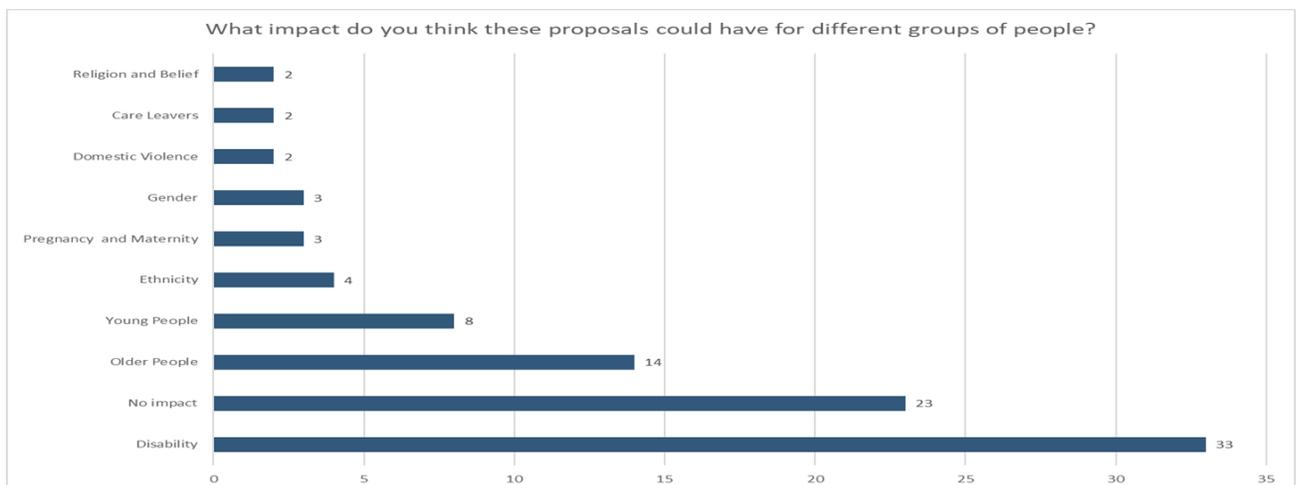
A large number of themes were present within the free-text responses to this question, but in analysis, these were themed in relation to the specific equalities categories they corresponded to:

- Disability
 - A consistent theme in this question was to do with applicants with Mental Health Disabilities, Learning Disabilities and Autism. One respondent was concerned that the forms might not be user friendly for people with this kind of need:
 - ***'The process should be dyslexic friendly and should be simpler. A document explaining how to apply for professionals would also be helpful for those who are trying to support someone one homefinder. The system isn't set up for people with mental health conditions currently which needs to be addressed.'***
 - ***'These changes might make some things difficult for less able & infirmed and those with other needs when making an application i.e some who need help to fill in forms may find 28 days too short. Others with more specidfic needs might find three offers too few.'***
 - Respondents, however, for the most part did not mention specific ways in which people with these forms of disabilities would be affected, but they showed a concern that their needs to be borne in mind since they might otherwise be overlooked:
 - ***'I think these proposals will have a negative effect on autistic adults living at home who wish to have an independent life and be settled before their parents die. There are many autistic adults living at home who probably are not known to services because they are protected and supported by their aging parents .And because although their autism is "mild" they are still not able to hold down a job or employers are prejudiced and don't want to employ them . If you look at private rentals Coventry most do not take rentees on Housing benefit /Universal credit which is what would be needed for an autistic person to move out of home'***
 - People were more positive towards the policy with regards to physical disabilities and adapted properties:

- ***'It would be a positive change to make it easier for disabled people to access suitable properties.'***
- Older People
 - Most of the responses to do with Older People were concerned with access to the internet and the application system:
 - ***'However, older people who are not computer literate and people who do not speak much english may struggle with the online applications and yearly renewal'***
 - One respondent was concerned with the reduction in income Older People have when retiring:
 - ***'This could affect older people as they retire from work and receive reduced income. If they are in private rented accommodation they may become unable to afford the rent.'***
 - Other responses were to do with ensuring that people receive offers of homes with necessary adaptations.
- Young People
 - Responses to do with Young People were to do with newly forming households of young people and young families moving out of the parental household, as well as younger families requiring bigger accommodation:
 - ***'This could have a bad effect on young couple trying to start a family without correct help from housing and ending up in hostels. This could also stop bigger families having correct size accommodation and living in small flats with large families and older people living 3 - 4 bedroom housing where they do not need the space for like other people it could also have a knock on effect and stop people with children with invisible disabilities to be given housing and have to live in flat that are no suitable for there childs needs.'***
- Ethnicity
 - There were a number of responses to do with those who struggle with English language skills, as well as one response which talked about the cultural needs of individuals which can be met through living in certain areas:
 - ***'think you need to allow people more time to apply for housing, especially if they are not fluent in English'***
 - ***'There are areas which have a built up community which meets with the individuals cultural needs, however not having a direct local connection will prevent them from being able to move to these areas.'***
- Pregnancy and Maternity

- Respondents were concerned about the changing needs of pregnant women:
 - ***'I do think home finder need to take into consideration on people who are pregnant or have children more as their family is growing and the property in which they are in may not be suitable for them no more'***
- Gender
 - Two responses were received which focused on the needs of women as mothers, whereas another focused on the needs of single men:
 - ***'need to ensure women especially with children are not adversely affected by any new housing assessment changes'***
 - ***'Is there accommodation available for single men? Seems to be an underrepresented group'***
- Domestic Violence
 - Respondents were keen that Domestic Violence victims were given a higher priority.
 - ***'If you are pregnant or in a volatile situation (bad family or relationship) these may need more priority due to the nature of need.'***
- Care Leavers
 - One care leaver felt that the changes were very positive, though another respondent felt that additional support should be given for this group.
 - ***'What additional support is available for care leavers to enable them to become tenancy ready? They need help to do so.'***
- Religion and Belief
 - Two responses were included in this theme, but their meaning was unclear:
 - ***'Helping people that are religious under 16'***
 - ***'Religion and belief.'***

The following chart details the relative prevalence of themes:



T. Question Eleven – Any other comments or alternative suggestions

This question encouraged respondents to make comments or alternative suggestions. Unlike previous questions, respondents were not asked to indicate their level of agreement for any particular proposal. The majority of responses were the same as others which had appeared in previous consultation responses, but a small number of new alternative proposals were advanced – these alternative proposals are shown in full below:

Consideration to demographics and time on the waiting list should be considered. It would be useful to see statistics on demographics of households in each band to affirm whether housing is allocated to various households (working /non working, health/non-health needs, etc) thereby avoiding clusters of society being grouped together and demonstrating that Housing is allocated fairly.

Take a close look at what the prevention team are doing with home finder.

Let's say you have 6, 3 bedroom houses, allow these to be allocated to different bands 2 for band 1, 1 for band 2 ect.

Register everyone with full bidding power and remove the agents from doing this (including those who are in hostels and hotels).

Clearly the prevention team need to be involved with bidding but only to oversee and check up their actually bidding because they come across as bullies pushing people into situations and properties which makes them scared or uncomfortable (forcing people into places that no-one wants just so someone is paying the rent/bills), greed.

Stop putting properties on home finder which are not even ready, haven't even handed the keys back and at times where people are still living there. Believe me I have actually went searching for some of these home finder homes and the worst was one which needed so much work, it would take over 3 months to complete and the Tennant's friend was ripping everything out the same week it was up for bidding and the keys were not to be handed in until a week after bidding finished? You want to reorganize us bidders, you need to crack a whip with whitefriers/citizen.

If you can't remove the agents from bidding on behalf of applicants, them limit how many bids they can do, to give everyone else a chance Or stop being dishonest, tell us all we can't bid anymore and tell us we will choose where you will all live and when you will get a home. Stick to your policy this time.

Incentive for more social housing and not affordable housing to be built.

Week to week you should be able to at least see your bid position actually going down, you don't, why? Sort it would you, it's soul destroying.

Stop telling people to find private housing when you are fully aware of the average prices and are fully aware how much you get towards help with private housing and what the massive discrepancy between the two are

Personal interviews should be done on application and the applicants told within 28 days of receipt-the results of their application to go on the register. Accepted or not by an independent board.

As you know Liverpool had the scheme houses for a £1.00 with the criteria being that they had to be renovated to a spec set by the council and funded by the purchaser, so if any properties in Coventry would fit this then worth a try. I think also have categories, I know you have bands, but maybe consider age ranges of the applicants this will potentially help in managing a bigger problem later and will also help with types of accommodation, for example over 55's could go to retirement villages etc

My alternative suggestion is to create an in-depth application form where you can really determine who is genuinely desperate for re-housing not just those who are homeless. To have such strict bands will only force people to become homeless on purpose so that they can escape their lives and get rehomed. Don't let this happen.

How about having a policy where instead of handing bags of public money to private investors so they can build a council house we didn't need (£40 million) or a hotel opposite a hotel (£3 million), we have a policy of starting up house co-operatives based on the Starley Road model.

Imagine for a moment, if Grenfell tower were a housing co-op, where the residents had ownership and control of the block while they lived there, where they decided for themselves what rents to charge, and what to do with that, via democracy, 1 resident, 1 vote.

At just £400 per flat per month which for Kensington would be insanely cheap, but, at £400 a month per flat the block would have raised £48,000 a month, I highly doubt they would have voted for flammable cladding over sprinklers, and from there they could actually invest themselves in new housing to expand tenant owned & ran co-op.

If you want to solve the housing crisis, put the people experiencing it in charge of solving it instead of handing our money over to semi privatised housing co-ops who mostly could not give a flying copulation about the residents needs so long as they keep paying.

It is about time public actually meant public, not government vs private.

Or would that be too much like common sense?

Add a home swap or exchange as the current version doesn't work well

5. Other consultation contact and/or feedback

- **Paper Surveys** – Paper surveys and relevant consultation information were made available in all 14 Council run libraries. In total 9 surveys were returned via this route. 21 paper surveys were returned following the mailout to specific applicants registered on Coventry Homefinder. In addition, 1 paper survey was returned to Broadgate House. Making a total of 31 paper surveys. These have been inputted onto the Let's Talk survey for analysis purposes and are included in the overall total of consultation responses. 2 paper surveys was received after the consultation had closed.
- **Telephone** - Across the 8-week consultation survey period 39 calls were received about the Coventry Homefinder Review. 2 customers were sent a consultation pack by post and 2 customers received the details of the consultation via email. All other customer queries were answered by the Customer Services Advisor.

- **Email** - In total 6 emails to the Housing Strategy inbox were received. These emails questions and/or responses have been inputted into the Let's Talk survey for analysis purposes and are included in the overall total of consultation responses.
- **Replies to Coventry Homefinder auto message** - In total 6 reply messages were received via the Coventry Homefinder Website. These messages were forwarded by the Coventry Homefinder Team to the Housing Strategy inbox to enable them to be input into the Let's Talk survey for analysis purposes and are included in the overall total of consultation responses. Most of the comments received related to their personal circumstances and/or seeking confirmation that they were still able to bid for properties.

6. Key changes made to proposals following consultation

Question One - Definitions

The consultation survey asked respondents to consider three definitions to underpin the revised policy. There was concern raised regarding how the assessment of an applicant being '**adequately housed**' would be carried out. As part of the application process it is intended that the application form will ask specific questions to assess whether an applicant is adequately housed and provide flexibility for an applicant to explain their individual circumstances.

The '**low housing need**' definition generated most feedback. The actual term was disliked as it was felt it diminished the applicants housing circumstances and this has been changed following consultation to the 'housing need' definition. Some respondents felt the definition was too vague and suggested other situations that needed to be reflected or where further clarity was required. Amendments to the definition have been made to reflect this following consultation, for example applicants currently living together who wish to live separately (e.g. relationship breakdown).

Some respondents felt the '**tenancy readiness**' definition was not required. This has been retained as it is required to support the proposed banding system.

Some respondents did misinterpret the definitions to be the new banding system. This is not the case. For example, some respondents thought that if they lived with friends or family in overcrowded conditions they would be placed in band four – low housing need. This would not be the case as housing need due to overcrowding receives greater priority within the banding system – band 2 or band 3 depending on level of overcrowding.

Question Two – Qualification Criteria

Following consultation all recommendations relating to qualification criteria are recommended for approval. Respondents raised some concerns regarding the 'adequately housed' definition but were supportive of having a qualification criteria requirement to have an assessed housing need. There was strong support to prioritise those people with a local connection to Coventry.

There was some disagreement with adding an asset and income cap or if this was added making sure that it was reflective of housing costs and income levels in the City. The income cap level was published in the draft policy document but not highlighted in the key changes document. The income cap of £50,000 is still recommended as it is reflective of income levels and housing costs

but as part the assessment process consideration will be given to an applicant's individual circumstances in terms of their income and expenditure.

Question Three – Changing the banding system – ‘reasonable preference criteria’.

There was public support for changing the banding system. Understandably current applicants registered on Coventry Homefinder were concerned about the impact on current applicants and how they would personally be affected. All applicants will need to re-apply. Comprehensive reassessments will be carried out to determine whether current applicants still qualify, and if so what their assessed housing need is to determine their banding within the revised banding system. Where possible (depending on the information already held within the Housing and Homelessness Service) some applicants who already have a priority need may be automatically transferred to a new band. It is still recommended to change the banding system. Current applicants will have the right to appeal the decision as to whether they qualify or their banding. Current applicants who re-apply within the specified timescales will retain their effective date from the old scheme. It is recommended that the revised banding system including the reduced preference band is approved.

Question four – The Reduced Preference Band

There was broad support for the introduction of the reduced preference band although some respondents highlighted their disagreement with the different reasons you could be placed in reduced preference.

This particularly related to being replaced in reduced preference for **refusing three suitable offers of accommodation** when the information about individual properties is very poor and therefore it is currently difficult to make informed decisions. Where adverts were inaccurate and thus not suitable for the household needs then it would not count as a suitable offer. The new IT system will provide the opportunity to improve the information available about individual properties. Registered Providers are committed to improving the information they provide to support applicant decision making in order for them to let their properties quickly.

Whilst there was concern about the requirement for bands 1 and 2 to be **‘actively bidding’** for suitable properties who lead to applicants losing community networks there was recognition that applicants in bands 1 and 2 had been assessed as being in urgent housing need and therefore should be actively seeking suitable accommodation. Where suitable accommodation hasn't been advertised then an applicant would not be placed in reduced preference, for example an applicant requires a 4-bedroom property, and none have been advertised.

In relation to **‘unsuitable to be a tenant’** due to unacceptable behaviour or rent arrears. Respondents were concerned that rent arrears are a common problem and how would people be supported to address these difficulties. The reduced preference band is intended to be a temporary band. Information and advice will be provided to support applicants to help them understand the reason the reduced preference has been applied and what they need to do to leave band and return to their normal band. This is to ensure that applicants are able to assess social housing in the future.

Question five – Bidding Cycle

There was significant support for changing the bidding cycle. There was concern about people being able to gain IT access. Whilst properties will be advertised any day (Monday to Friday)

properties will be available to bid on for 7 days which is longer than the current timeframe and will support those with limited IT access to still bid. The new IT system should also provide more opportunities for assistive/auto bidding for those applicants without IT access. The change to the bidding cycle is recommended for approval.

Question six – Number of refused offers

Reducing the number of refused offers is recommended following consultation. The public supported reducing the number of refused offers from 5 to 3. As highlighted previously in question four, the Council will work in partnership with the Registered Providers to improve the information available about individual properties. There was some concern that refusing offers would lead to applicants making pressured decisions. The Council will monitor refusals to provide additional advice to applicants and/or improve information about individual properties. Applicants will still have the opportunity within a specified timeframe to provide evidence that a refused offer was unsuitable and the reasons why before it counts as a refused offer under the policy. If an applicant is placed in reduced preference for refusal of three offers they will also have the right to request a review of this decision under the revised policy.

Question seven – Adapted properties

The consultation survey feedback indicated strong support for this change to how adapted properties are advertised and allocated. There was some concern that adapted properties would still be offered to people who do not require an adapted property. This scenario could still happen as Coventry Homefinder is a choice based letting scheme based on applicants bidding on properties. However adapted properties are in high demand and increased visibility of available properties should mean applicants requiring adaptations will bid on the adapted properties that become available. Following consultation this change is still recommended.

Question eight – Application process

There was significant support for changing the application process to a one stage process from both the general public, Registered Providers and from voluntary sector organisations. As respondents felt it would be a simpler and less stressful application process. Support would still be available for people to complete the form. The Council will work with the IT supplier to build a simple form whereby relevant guidance to support those completing it. Following consultation this change is still recommended.

Question nine – Annual review process

Whilst there was support for changing the length of time an applicant has to complete the annual review process from 125 days to 28 days. A number of consultation responses highlighted their concern that 28 days was too short for some vulnerable groups/people. A number of respondents suggested an alternative appropriate timeframe would be 50 or 56 days. Following consultation, the Council has amended its proposal. It is now proposed that applicants will be given 56 days to complete the annual review process.

Question ten – Equalities

The consultation statement has provided some examples of where respondents felt that there could be specific impacts for certain groups with protected characteristics. These have been considered and explored within the Equality and Consultation Analysis (ECA)– Appendix C of this

report. Overall it is considered that these proposals could have both a positive and negative impact. The ECA outlines where potential negative impact has been identified what mitigations could be put in place to mitigate these. Equalities will be monitored as part of implementation and a review of impact will be carried out one year following implementation.

Question eleven – Any other comments/suggestions

This report presents a wide-ranging number of alternative suggestions which relate more generally to the availability of affordable housing and private sector housing. There are several suggestions relating to the implementation of the Housing Allocations Policy, including having an in depth application form. This will be required in order to assess an applicant's housing need.

Some comments received relate to applicant's dissatisfaction on bidding processes for homelessness households. These have been fed back to the operational team.

Some suggestions relate to when properties are advertised when they still require repairs. These comments have been fed back to Registered Providers as they make the decision as to when to advertise their properties. In addition, 'home swap' exchange sites operate nationally and cannot be locally determined.

Appendix 1 – List of organisations and/or registered providers who responded to consultation. – Where the organisational name was given

Registered Providers

- Accord – Organisational Response
- Citizen – Organisational Response
- Coventry and Warwickshire YMCA (this registered provider does not currently let properties through Coventry Homefinder)
- Orbit – Organisational Response
- Midland Heart – Organisational Response
- Nehemiah Housing – Organisational Response
- Stonewater Housing Association – Organisational Response
- Citizen – Employee Response
- Midland Heart – Employee Response
- Unknown Response (organisation name not provided)

Voluntary and Community Sector and other organisational responses

- St Basil's
- Citizen's Advice – Employee Response
- Citizen's Advice – Employee Response
- Citizen's Advice – Employee Response
- Coventry Citizen's Advice – Organisational Response
- Coventry Haven Women's Aid
- Crisis Skylight
- Coventry Frontline Network
- National Energy Action
- Prefer not to say