

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Tenant Services Management Board –14th February 2011

Homefinder Somerset Common Allocations Policy –

Revised Policy December 2010

Report of Stephen Boland – Housing Services Lead

(This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Jean Adkins)

1.0 Executive Summary

The Homefinder Somerset Monitoring Board Review Group has undertaken a detailed and thorough review of the partnership allocations policy.

The review has also included the findings of the Somerset wide overview and scrutiny review undertaken by Members.

Applicant and stakeholder consultation has confirmed that there is wide support for the changes being proposed.

Subject to approval, the proposed changes are planned to be implemented across the Homefinder Somerset partnership early in May / June 2011.

2.0 Introduction

The Homefinder Somerset partnership was formed in 2005. The partnership secured central government funding for the introduction of Choice Based Letting (CBL) as a method of allocating social housing in the Somerset area. This partnership also sought to maximise the efficiency benefits of a joint procurement exercise for a new computer system and the benefits to the housing register applicants and landlords in Somerset of having one common allocations policy across the county.

This partnership, made up of the five housing authorities within Somerset and their principle social housing landlords began a project to implement CBL using a new computer system. The new CBL scheme together with a common allocations policy and common housing register application form were successfully implemented in December 2008. Since that time the scheme has operated very effectively.

At the outset the key partners recognised that there would need to be a mechanism for any issues to be highlighted and taken account of in terms of an allocation policy review. As such both the local authority and landlord partners

have raised any concerns that they have on the allocations policy, housing register application form and computer system via various partnership groups.

3.0 Homefinder Somerset review

Early in 2010 the Homefinder Somerset Monitoring Board agreed that a subgroup should focus on a full review of the allocation policy, the housing register form and the CBL computer system. This review has drawn upon the following strands of work:

- Listing of issues compiled from partnership landlord and local authority officer groups;
- Detailed report of a countywide overview and scrutiny review carried out by Members of the various local authority partners;
- Revised government guidance on allocations contained in 'Fair and flexible: statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England'; and
- A discussion on the latest government white paper 'Local decisions: a fairer future for social housing'.

This report sets out:

- the work of the review group;
- the resulting proposed changes to the common allocations policy; and
- public and stakeholder consultation that has been undertaken and its results

4.0 What the review has covered

The review group has discussed in detail all the issues that have been raised by landlords and local authority partners since the CBL scheme went live. In addition the review group considered a detailed scrutiny review that has been undertaken on the CBL scheme by a joint Member Scrutiny Panel. This scrutiny review concentrated on the customer facing aspects of the scheme and as such its findings and recommendations (which were set out in a 66 page report) have been closely analysed to ensure that wherever possible and affordable, suggested improvements can be made.

5.0 Proposed changes and consultation

After full consideration of the issues and recommendations set out above the review group agreed on a set of amendments to the common allocations policy. In line with best practice and legislative requirements, the partnership then consulted on these proposed changes, with a sample of applicants (10% of all

active applicants were consulted) and all stakeholders being consulted. The consultation period ran from late October to early December 2010.

The key proposed changes to the policy are:

- Assessment of applicant finances to establish if an applicant can meet their own housing needs;
- Assessing the level of medical considerations is proposed to change. Gold Band criteria will change from Life Threatening to Serious medical conditions and the Silver Band criteria will be reduced from Significant to Moderate medical conditions;
- Households who match 4 or more Silver Band 'housing needs' will be awarded Gold Band status for cumulative housing need;
- Tenants of Homefinder Somerset Partners, who live in Somerset and are required to relocate due to major rebuilding or renovation works, will be placed into Gold Band to facilitate the rebuilding/renovation works;
- The removal of the priority given to households with children under 10 that have no access to an enclosed garden as a consideration for silver banding (so they do not have the same priority as applicants who are homeless);
- Due to the shortage of social housing in the area, applicants with children who do not live with them permanently will not be entitled to an additional bedroom (this currently benefits single applicants only);
- To amend the policy to make it clearer when a property can be labelled for priority to local applicants;
- For a clearer definition of 'local connection' which is based on that used for homelessness. This makes it clearer for applicants and officers what 'local connection' means in terms of the common allocation policy;
- That homeless cases awarded Gold Band status who do not bid for suitable properties within 8 – 16 weeks may have automatic bids placed on their behalf by the relevant local authority for suitable properties – applicants will be consulted before this change is imposed;
- In order to reduce the number of applicants refusing offers, it is proposed that applicants who refuse 3 formal suitable offers may be placed into Bronze Band for 3 months, this would exclude accepted homeless cases; and
- In order to simplify the housing register application process it is proposed that the application form be amended so that it is reduced in size by approximately 50%;

The response to the consultation (Appendix 1) was positive with the majority of applicants and stakeholders agreeing with the proposed changes (in most cases

at least 60% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposed change and between 20 and 30% expressing no view).

In light of this response and having reviewed all of the consultation comments no changes have been made to the revised draft allocations policy (Appendix 2).

An equality impact assessment of the changes proposed in the revised policy has been undertaken and an action table produced (Appendix 3).

6.0 Recommendation

It is therefore recommended that the Tenant Services Management Board:

- Note the findings into the review of the existing Homefinder Somerset Common Allocations Policy
- Approve the revised draft Homefinder Somerset Common Allocations Policy.

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Results of Homefinder Somerset Allocations Policy Consultation

December 2010

Updated for Monitoring Board 1st February 2011

V2.0 12th January 2011
Anne Harland

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4.32 Q32 Are you satisfied that the Change of Circumstances form will be available for applicants to complete on-line as well as in paper version? 54

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Homefinder Somerset partnership have undertaken a review of the common allocation policy. This review suggested a number of changes to the common allocations policy. A public consultation exercise has taken place with both applicants and also with other stakeholders being asked a series of 33 or 34 questions on the proposed changes. This report sets out the results of the consultation exercise from both applicants and stakeholder perspective.
- 1.2 This report sets out the results of the consultation exercise from both applicants and stakeholder perspective.

2.0 Summary of Responses

- 2.1 The Homefinder Somerset Review Group agreed to sample 10% of active applicants for the consultation. With those that didn't have email addresses being written to. A total of 2169 applicants were contacted for the consultation (1093 were written to across all 5 local authority partners, and 1076 applicants were emailed).
- 2.2 All the housing providers within the Homefinder Somerset partnership were emailed requesting their feedback. In addition all other stakeholders that had an email contact address were emailed asking them to complete the questionnaire.
- 2.3 The consultation period ran from the 17th October to the 9th December 2010. There were 293 responses to the applicants survey and 74 responses to the stakeholder survey. However of the 293 applicants responses (13.5% response rate), 28 were from staff who had completed the applicant questionnaire rather than the stakeholder questionnaire.
- 2.4 A summary of the applicant responses is as follows:
- Of those responding 37.5% were tenants, 44% were applicants and 18.5% listed as other. Of those in the other category the vast majority were Local authority staff, with the next largest group being private tenants.
 - Applicants were in agreement (or had no view) on all of the proposed changes.
 - Those questions where 15% or more of applicants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposal were as follows:
 - Q3 – Financial assessment of applications
 - Q4 – Applicant accepting a property that doesn't meet their housing needs
 - Q11 – gold band award for applicants with no legal rights to succession
 - Q13 – Applicants being awarded gold band to move nearer their place of work.
 - Q14 – Removal of silver band for no garden when in first floor and children under 10 (or above) flat
 - Q17 – Removal of additional bedroom for staying access for single people
 - Q18 – Landlords restricting size of property applicant can bid for or allowing under occupying
 - Q19 – Under occupation of properties when bidding
 - Q20 – Labelling of properties for local connection
 - Q21 – Allowing supported accommodation to be let to those without support needs
 - Q23 – Not addressing the rural properties issue

- Q29 – Satisfaction that Homefinder Somerset scheme is fair and equitable

In all of the questions above the number of applicants that strongly agreed/agreed or had no view was greater than those that disagreed/strongly disagreed.

2.5 Summary of stakeholder responses is set out below:

- 53% of those responding to the stakeholder survey were landlords. The remainder were staff or members within the local authority partners, other smaller stakeholders, tenant panels and housing forum respondents and parish councils.
- The majority of those responding to the survey worked in general needs and lettings areas (19.4% and 16.7% respectively) with 23.6% working on the front line.
- 10 elected members responded with 3 parish councillors also responding to the survey.
- Those questions where 15% or more of stakeholders disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposal were as follows:
 - Q11 – gold band award for applicants with no legal rights to succession
 - Q12 – Applicants that live in property with shared facilities in silver band
 - Q13 – Applicants awarded gold band to move nearer place of work.
 - Q14 - Removal of silver band for no garden when in first floor and children under 10 (or above) flat (this was the biggest area of disagreement with 25.4% of those responding disagreeing or strongly disagreeing (61% strongly agree/agree)
 - Q17 - Removal of additional bedroom for staying access for single people
 - Q18 - Landlords restricting size of property applicant can bid for or allowing under occupying
 - Q21 – Allowing supported accommodation to be let to those without support needs
 - Q23 – Not addressing the rural properties issue
 - Q29 – Satisfaction that Homefinder Somerset scheme is fair and equitable
- Notwithstanding the above – stakeholders were in agreement with all of our proposed changes (looking at the percentage of those that agreed or strongly agreed).

2.6 The overall results of the survey indicate both applicant and stakeholder agreement with the proposed changes. However the Review group may wish to discuss in further detail the comments provided and those questions where 15% or more of those responding were in disagreement with the change (albeit that the majority were in agreement).

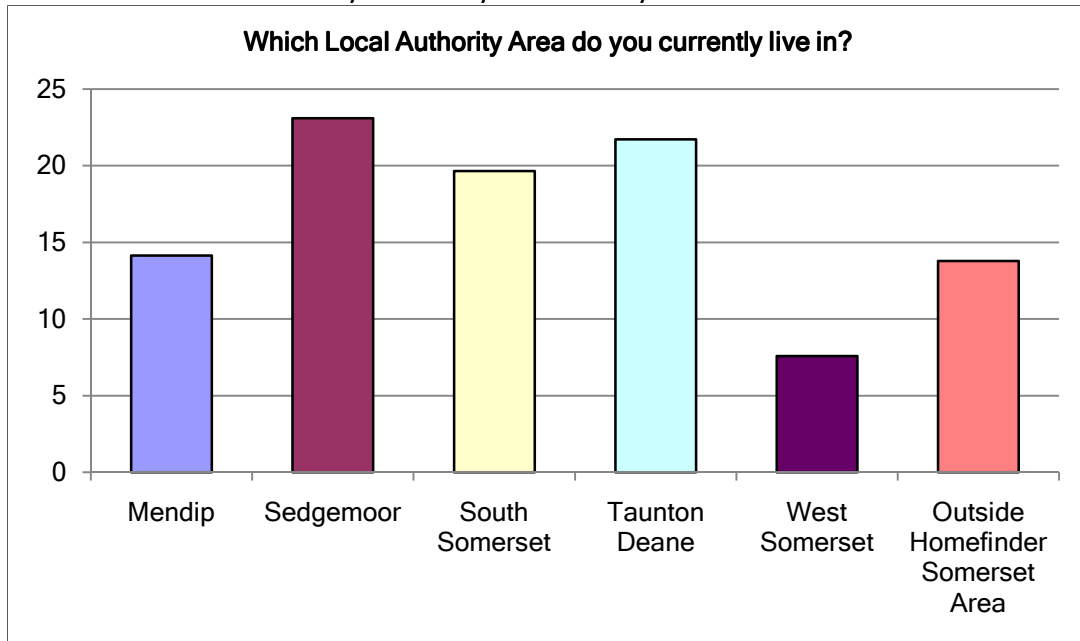
Update

2.7 The Review Group discussed this report and the comments that applicants had made, at their meeting on the 14th December 2010. Their comments against the questions highlighted at 2.4 and 2.5 above are included within this updated report for completeness.

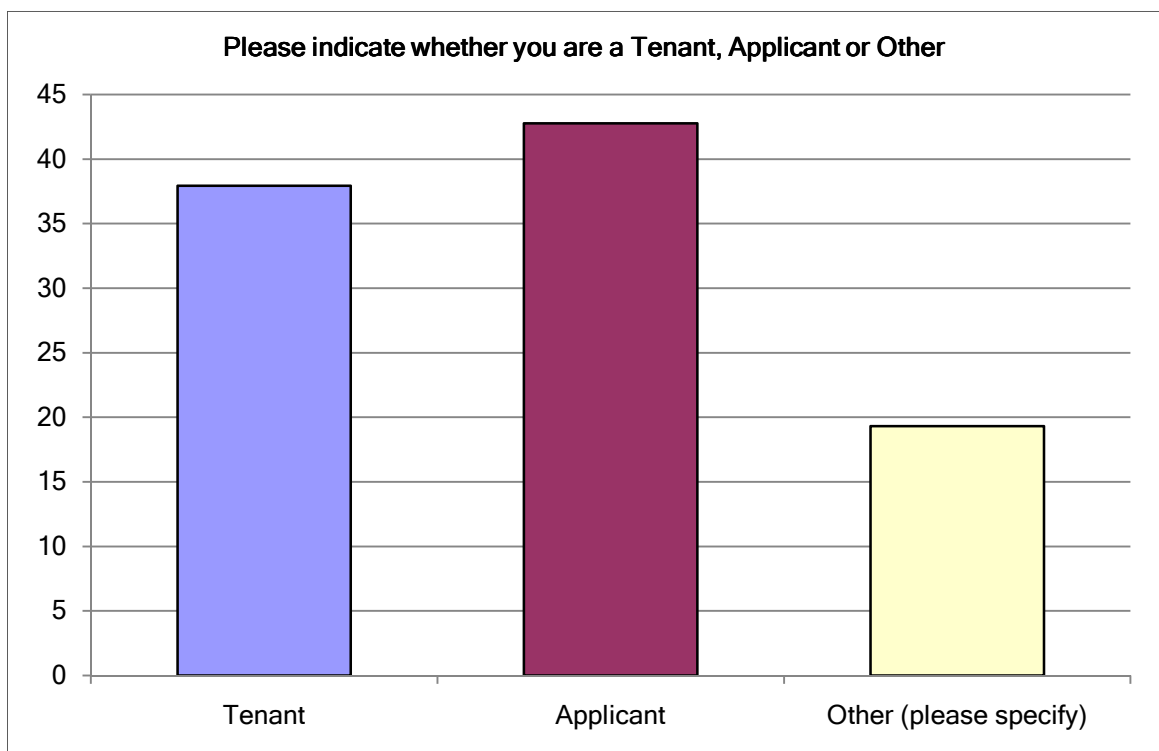
3.0 Detailed Applicant Feedback

3.1 For clarity the detailed feedback is set out against each question on the applicant survey below.

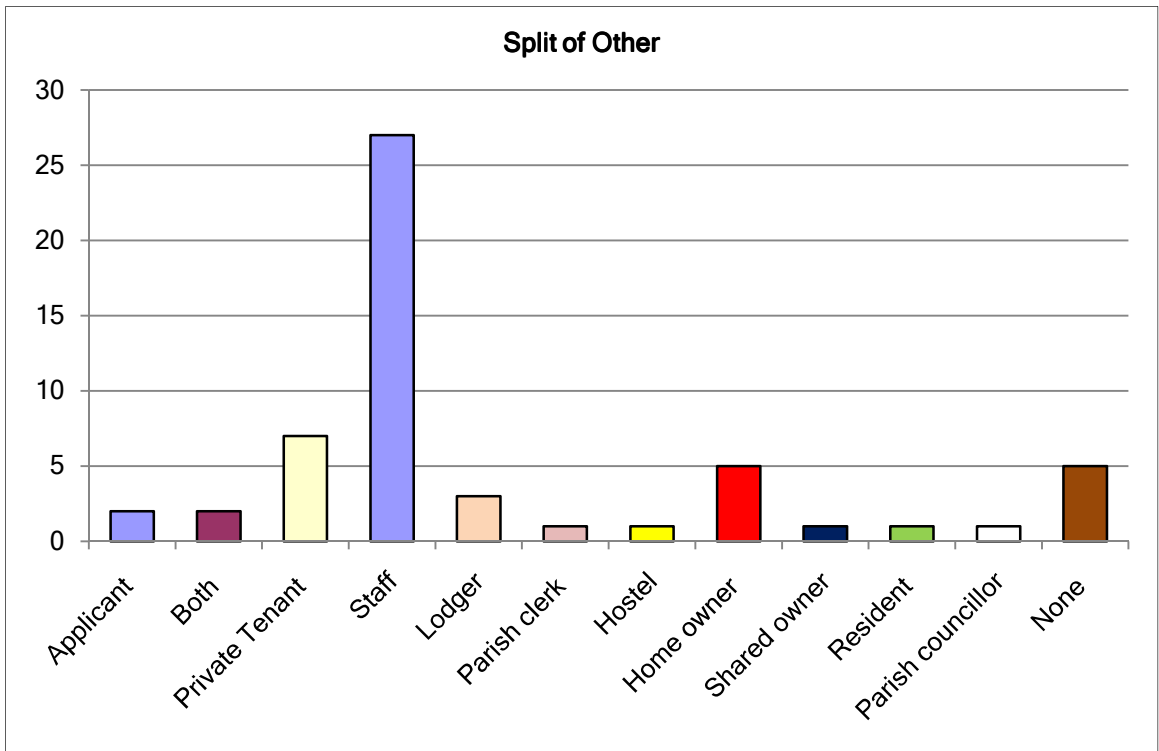
3.2 Q1 – Which Local Authority Area do you currently live in?



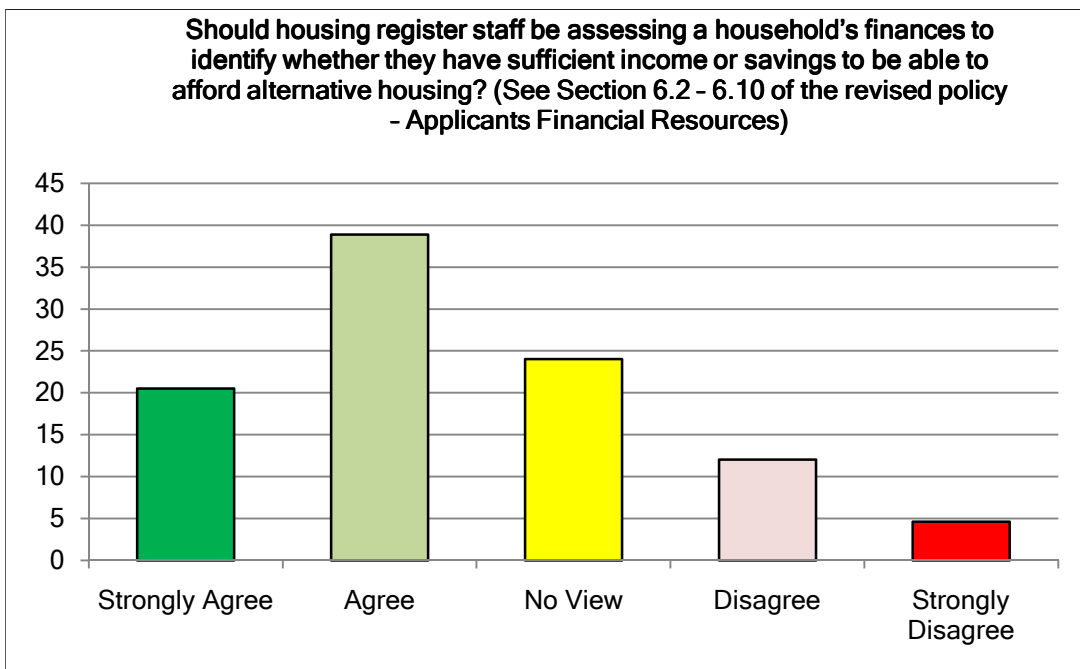
3.3 Q2 – Please indicate whether you are a Tenant, Applicant or Other?



The following graph shows the split of those responding 'other' (the graph shows numbers not percentages). In total 56 respondents stated other and just under half of those were staff from local authorities and housing providers.



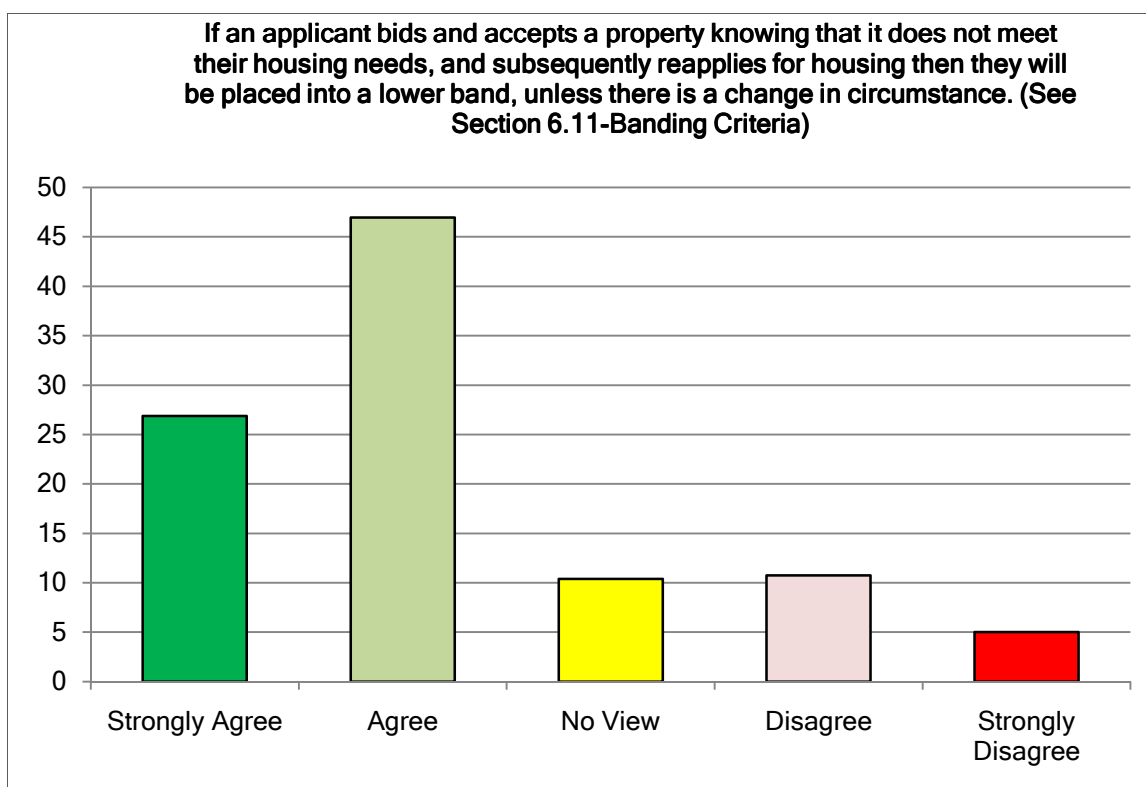
3.4 Q3 - Should housing register staff be assessing a household's finances to identify whether they have sufficient income or savings to be able to afford alternative housing? (See Section 6.2 – 6.10 of the revised policy – Applicants Financial Resources)



Update

The Review group discussed this question at their meeting on the 14th December 2010 and agreed that the financial assessment of applications should go ahead based on the responses received.

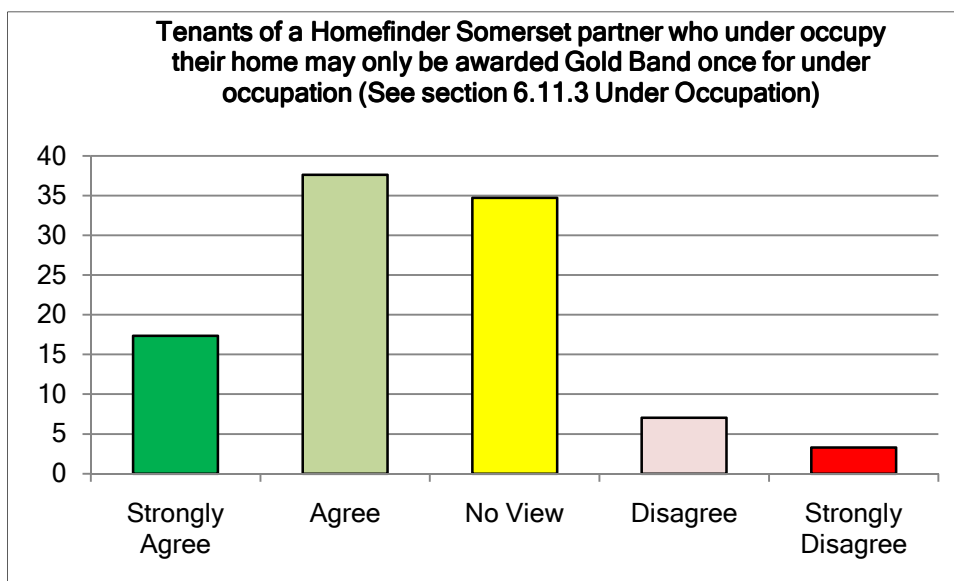
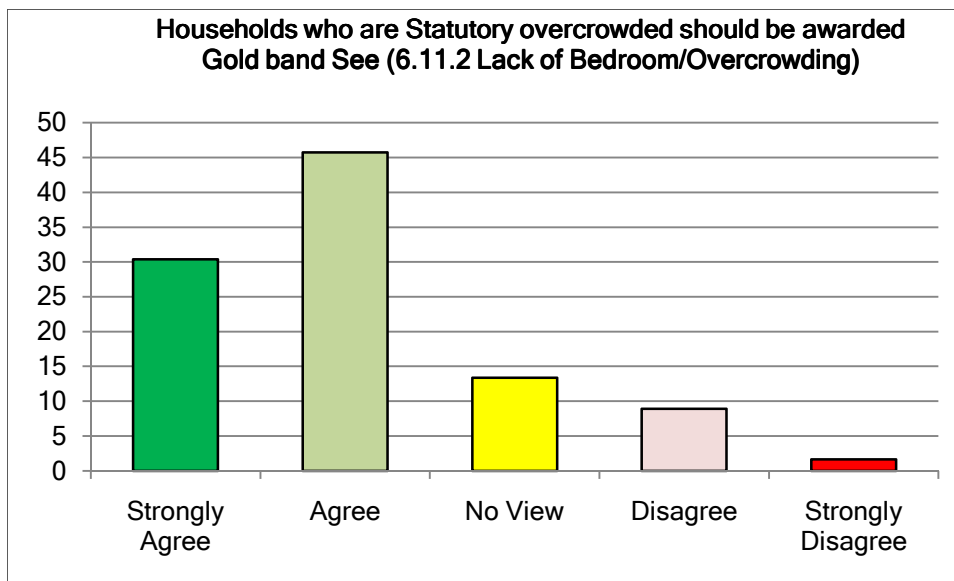
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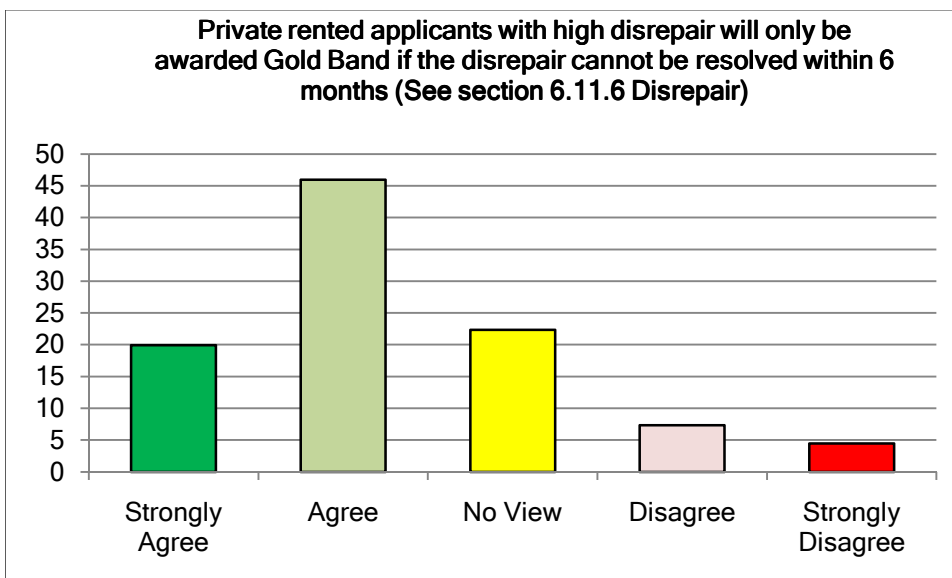
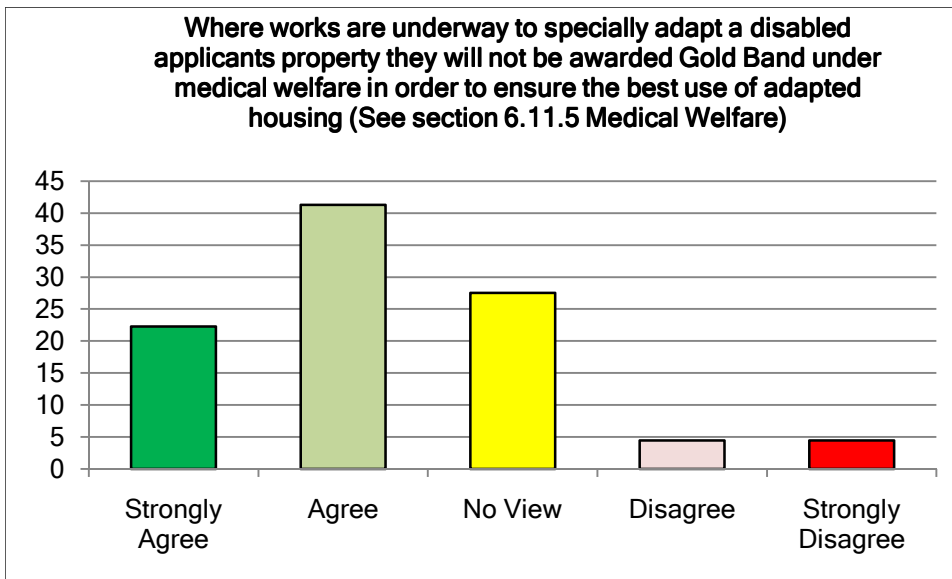


Update

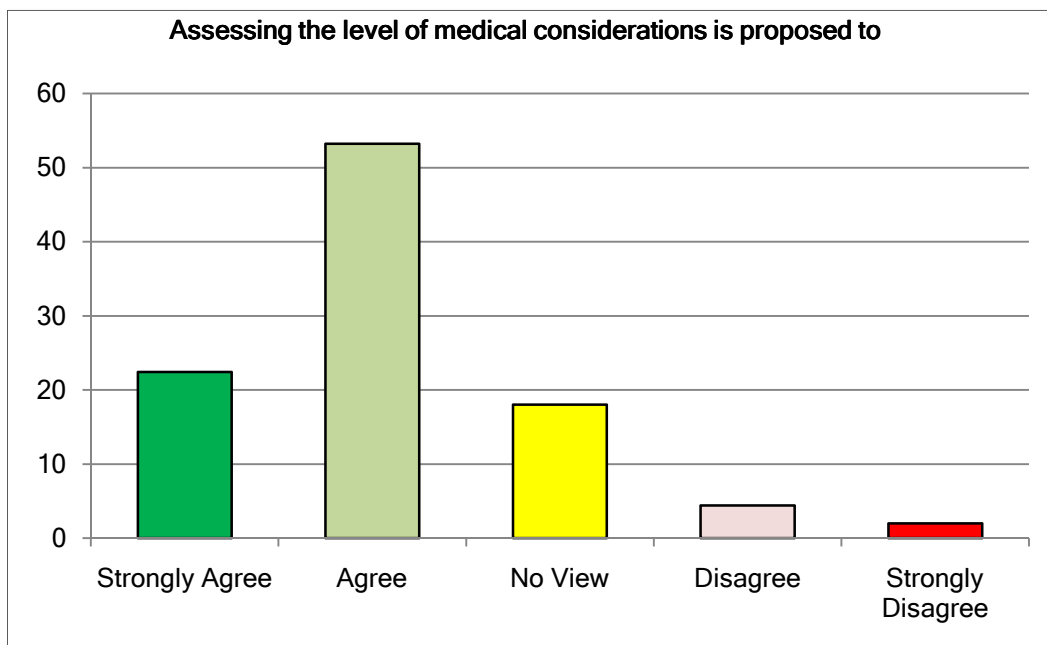
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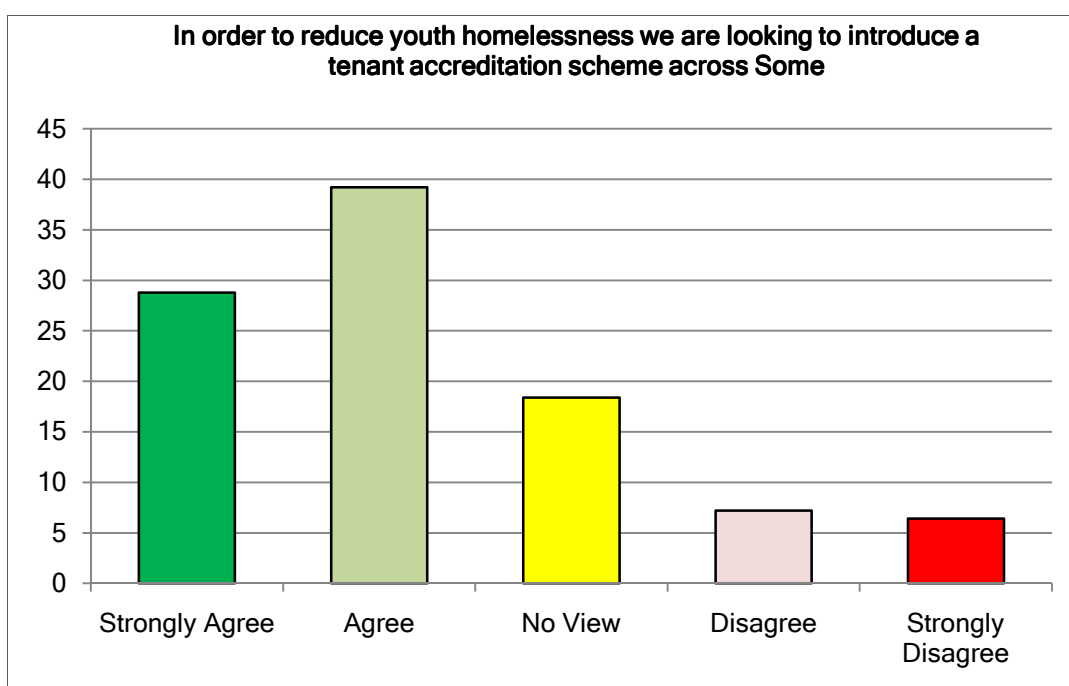




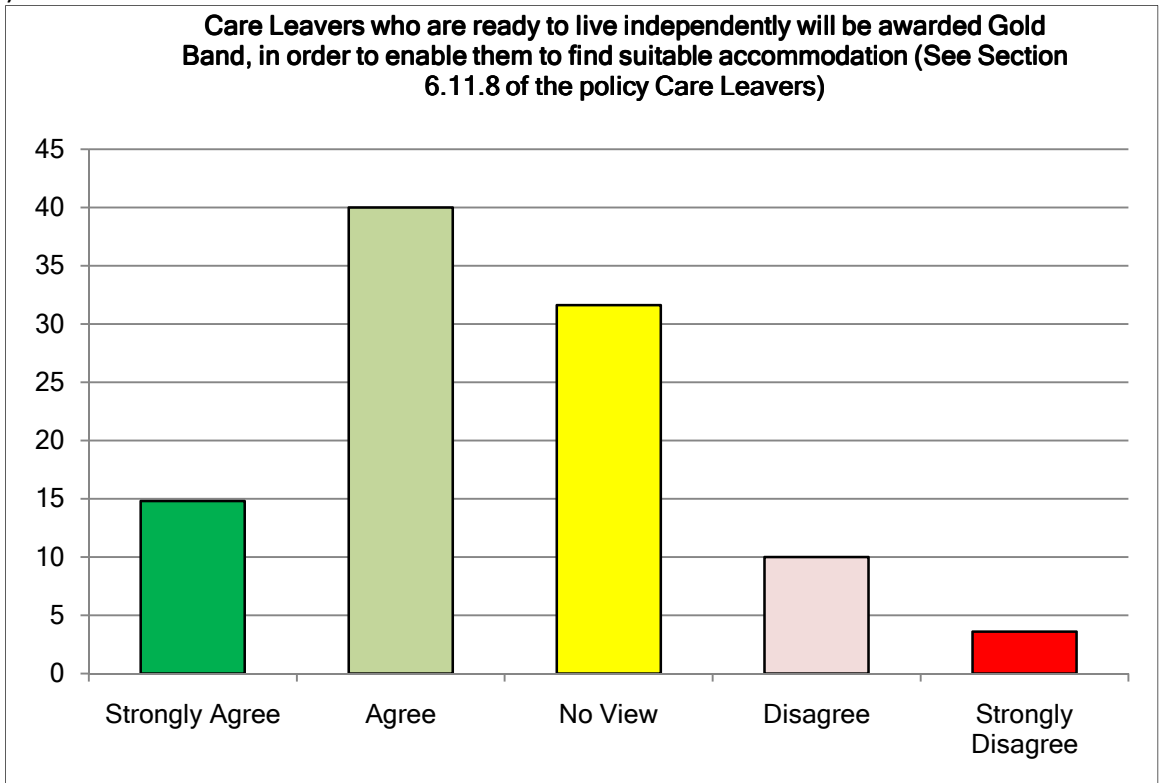
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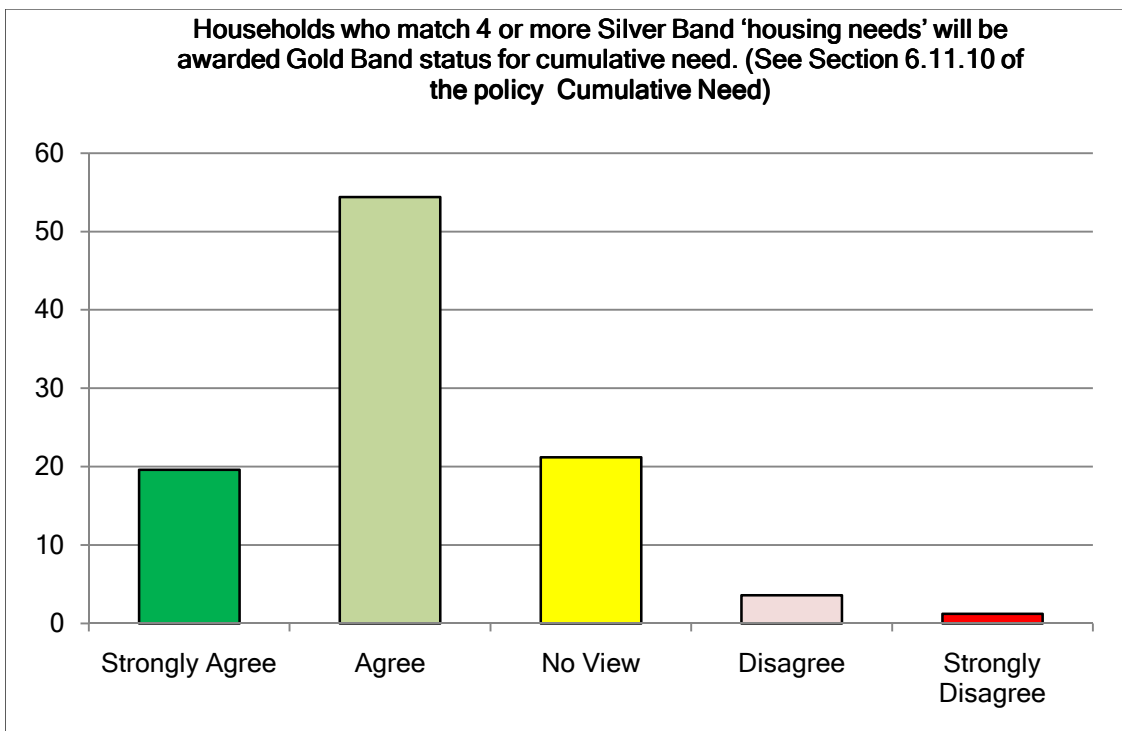
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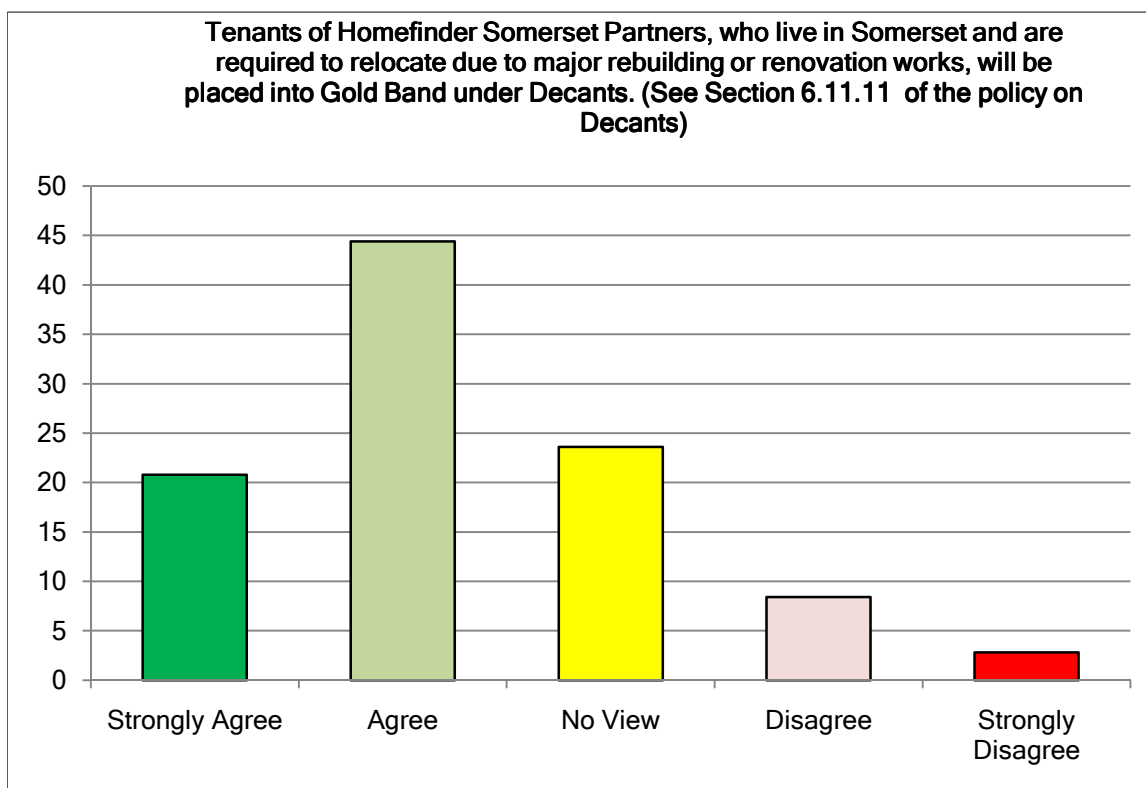
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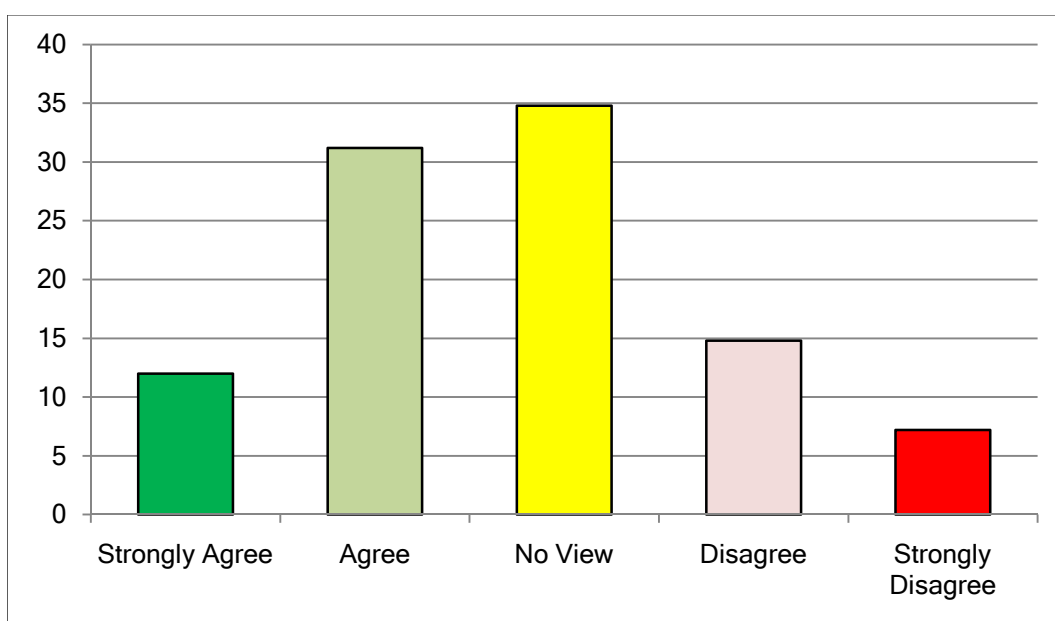
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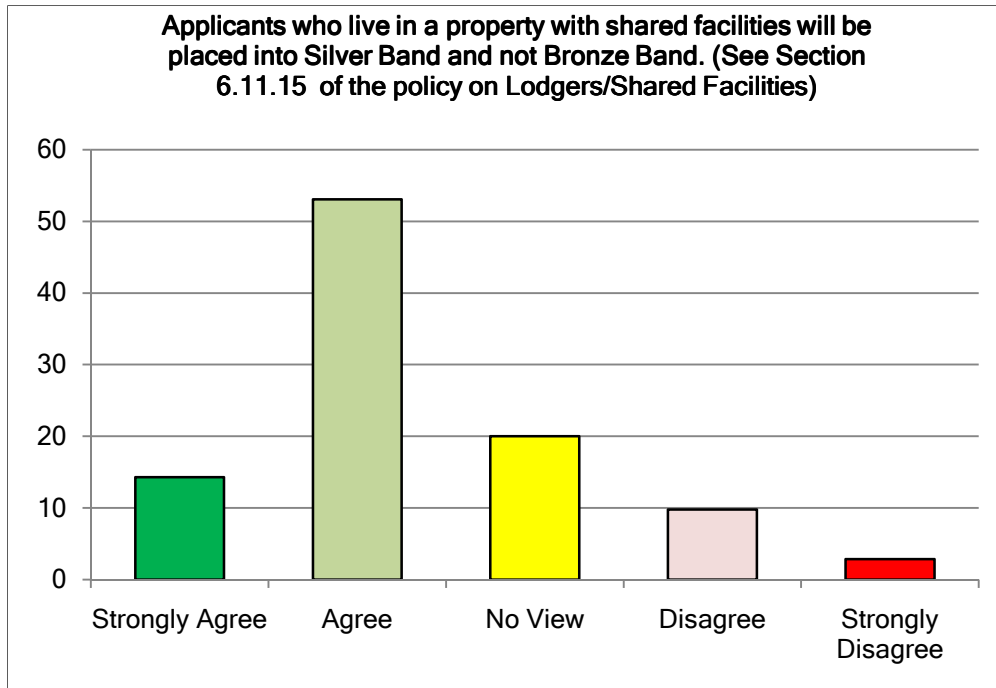
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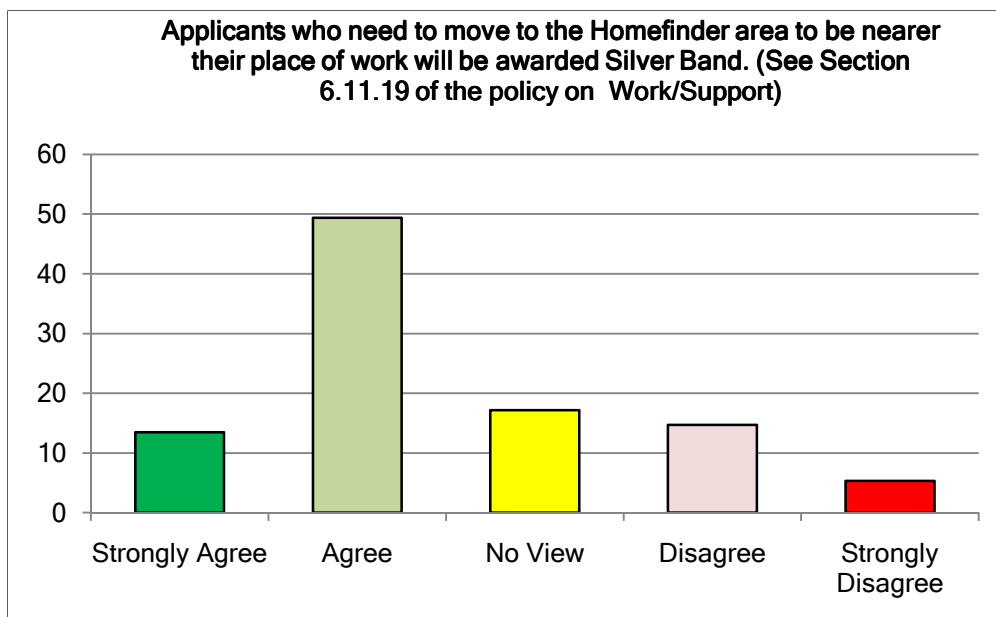
Update

The Review group discussed this question at their meeting on the 14th December 2010 and agreed that this change should go ahead based on the responses received. This was a positive change for applicants and would help landlords to make best use of the properties available should these circumstances arise.

3.13 Q12 - Applicants who live in a property with shared facilities will be placed into Silver Band and not Bronze Band. (See Section 6.11.15 of the policy on Lodgers/Shared Facilities)



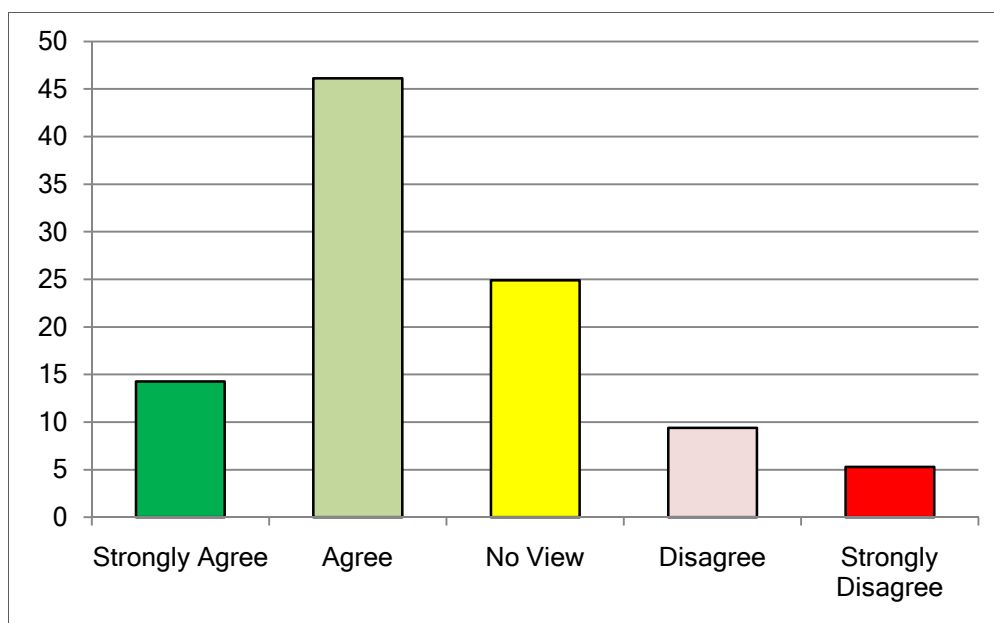
3.14 Q13 - Applicants who need to move to the Homefinder area to be nearer their place of work will be awarded Silver Band. (See Section 6.11.19 of the policy on Work/Support)



Update

The Review group discussed this question at their meeting on the 14th December 2010 and agreed that this change should go ahead based on the responses received. This was a positive change for applicants and would further improve mobility for employment in the social housing sector.

3.15 Q14 - We intend to remove the priority given to households with children under 10, with no access to an enclosed garden as a consideration for any housing (so they do not have the same priority as applicants who are homeless) (See Sections 6.11.22 & 6.11.17 of the policy - Other Homeless & Gardens).

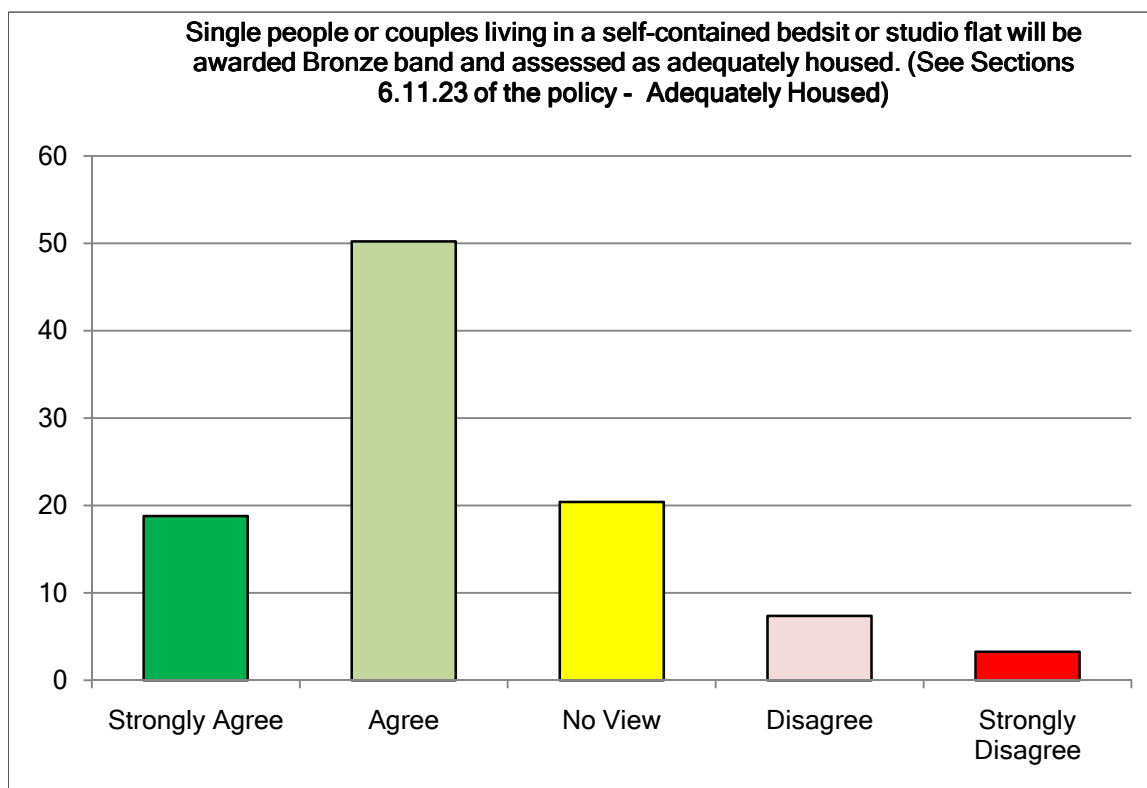


Update

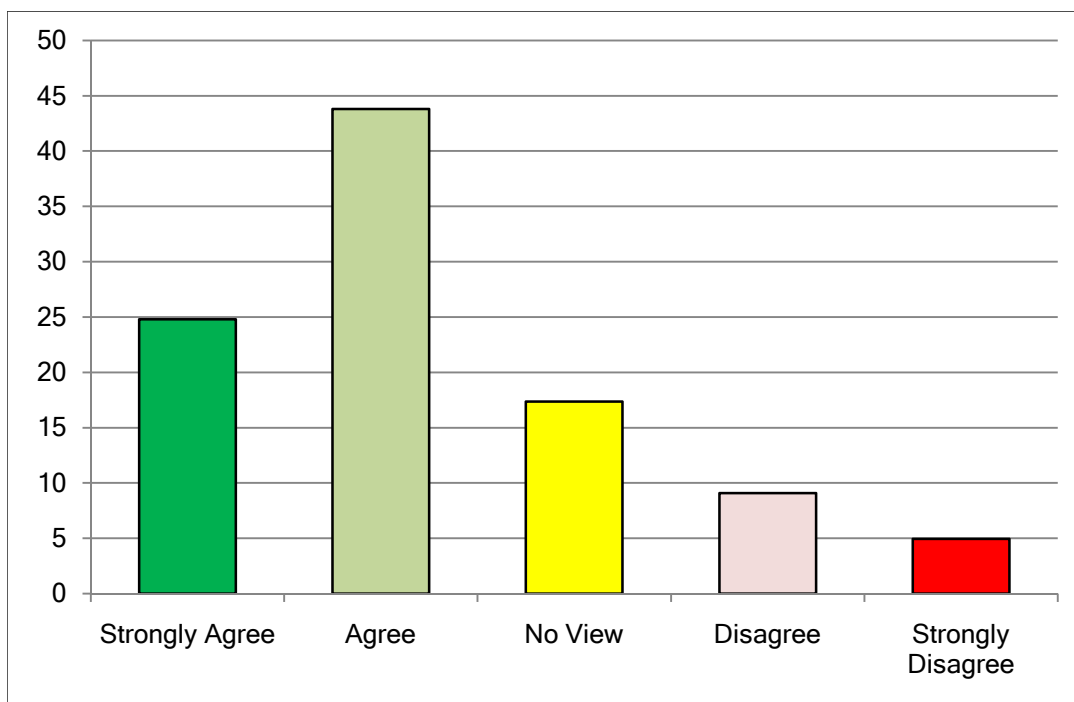
The Review group discussed this question at their meeting on the 14th December 2010 and agreed that this change should go ahead based on the responses received.

There was a wide ranging discussion on this change with one of the landlord partners raising particular concerns. However the group felt that, given the very limited supply of social housing that was available, that this change was necessary. The group felt that the policy and system were flexible enough to respond to the needs of emerging households and labelling could be used to help families in flats to obtain housing with access to an enclosed garden.

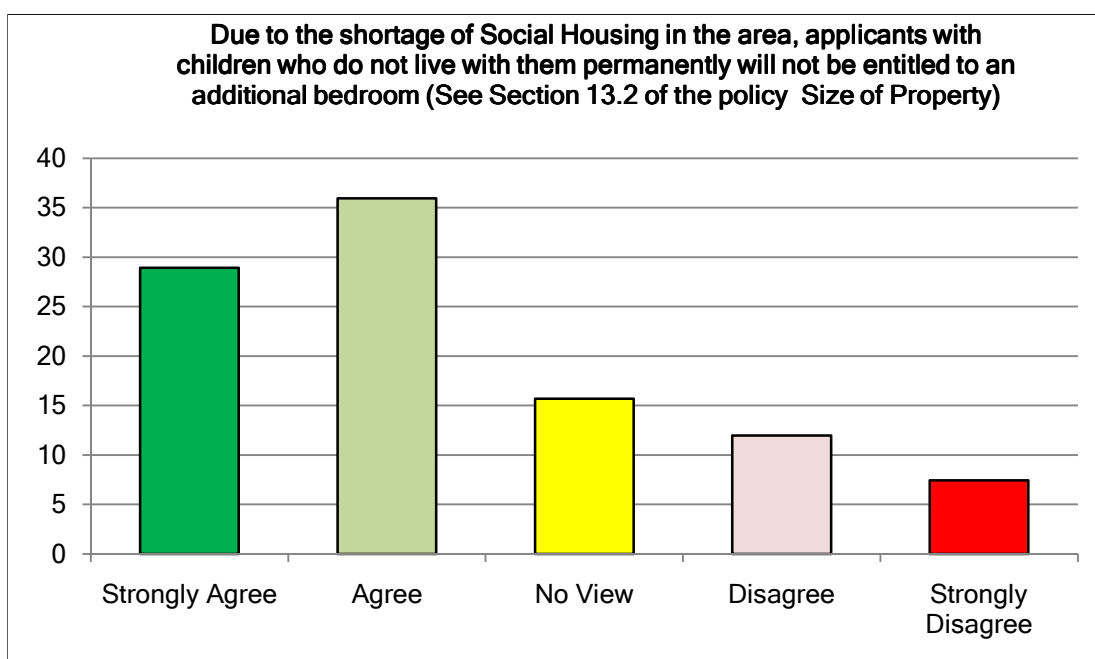
3.16 Q15 - Single people or couples living in a self-contained bedsit or studio flat will be awarded Bronze band and assessed as adequately housed. (See Sections 6.11.23 of the policy - Adequately Housed)



3.17 Q16 - The way that we will assess bedroom need has changed slightly - the following general rules will apply: Household members living together as a couple will be assessed as requiring 1 bedroom unless there are exceptional circumstances. Additional adults (defined as being 16 years of age or older) living permanently in a household will require an extra bedroom but may share if of the same gender. A maximum of two people can share a bedroom. Children who are over 7 and of different genders will require their own room. As a general point an applicants minimum bedroom requirement will be based on household members that are over 7 years old and under 16 years of age that are of the same sex sharing a bedroom, with household members over 7 years old and under 16 years of age of different sexes requiring their own rooms. The maximum entitlement will be based on all household members over 7 years of age requiring their own room. When letting houses, priority will normally be given to households with children under 16. The overall assessment will now be based on the minimum bedroom requirement for the household (See Section 13.1 (a) Bedroom Matrix)



3.18 Q17 - Due to the shortage of Social Housing in the area, applicants with children who do not live with them permanently will not be entitled to an additional bedroom (See Section 13.2 of the policy Size of Property)



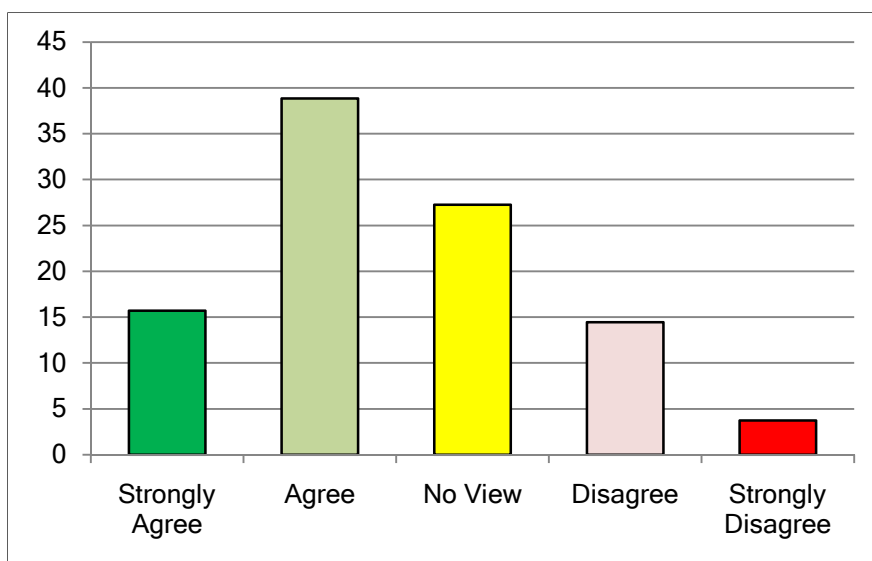
Update

The Review group discussed this question at their meeting on the 14th December 2010 and agreed that this change should go ahead based on the responses received.

There was discussion around the impact of this change on single applicants with access arrangements to children, but again it was felt that the change was necessary

given the limited supply of social housing. The changes proposed to Housing Benefit rules will make funding additional bedrooms harder for applicants in future. As such this change was in line with the restrictions that will be placed on HB payments.

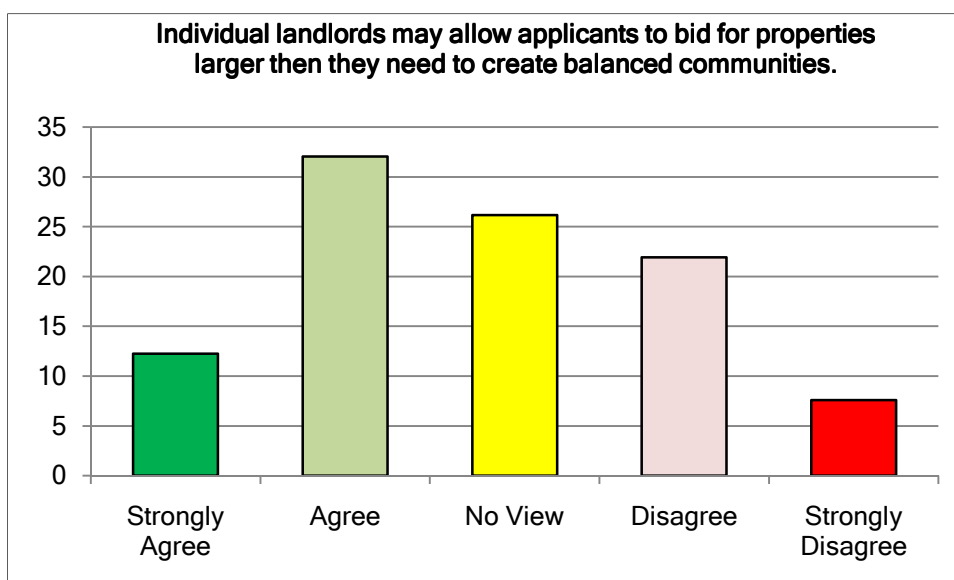
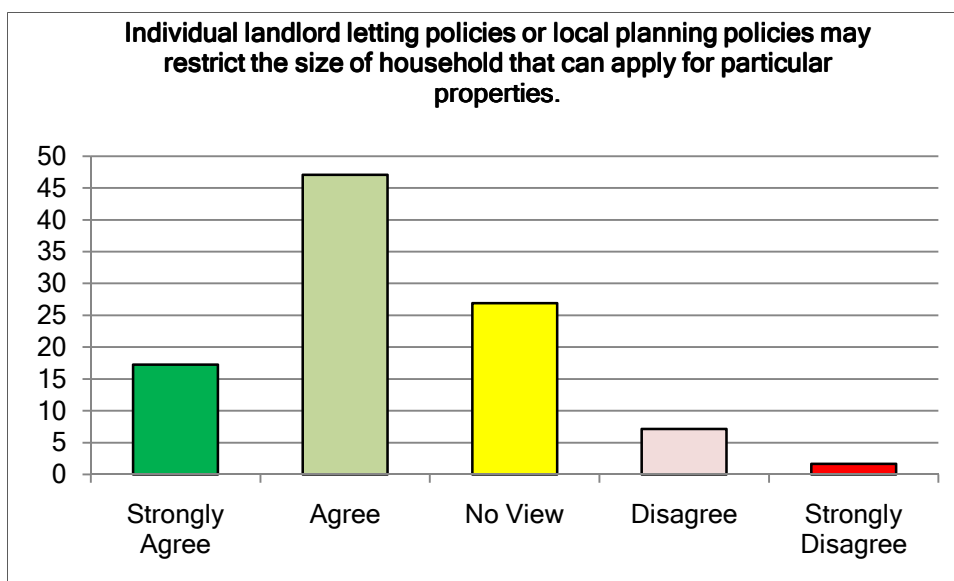
3.19 Q18 - On occasions Homefinder Somerset Landlords may restrict the size of property that households can apply for or allow applicants to under-occupy in order to help create local balanced communities. (See Section 13.1 of the policy Size of Property)



Update

The Review group discussed this question at their meeting on the 14th December 2010 and agreed that this change should go ahead based on the responses received.

3.20 Q19 – To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements regarding the size of property applicants can apply for:

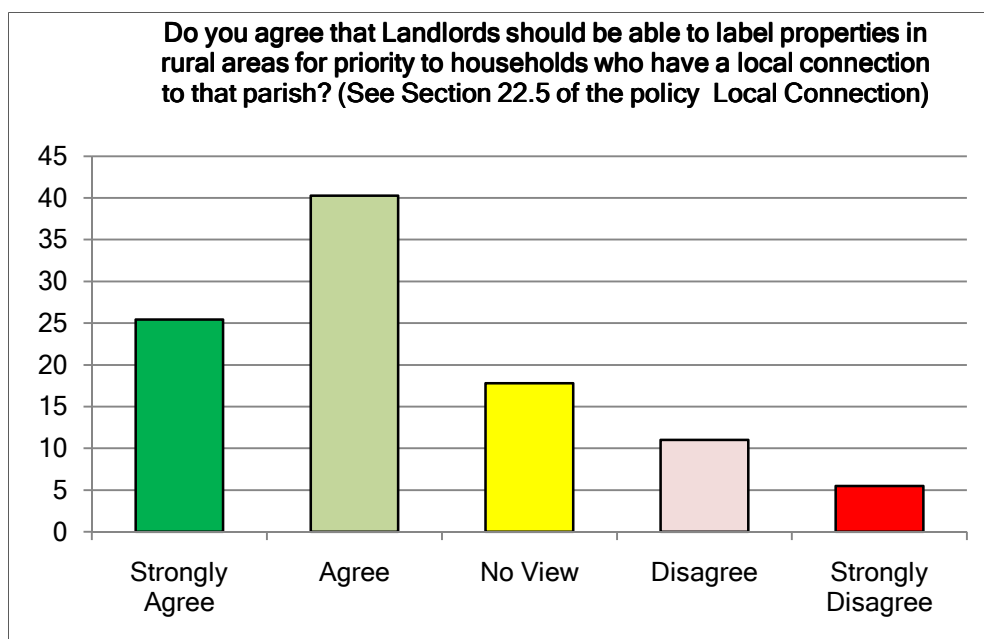


Update

The Review group discussed this question at their meeting on the 14th December 2010 and agreed that this change should go ahead based on the responses received.

The group felt that these changes would be needed even more in the future with the proposed changes to HB coming into effect.

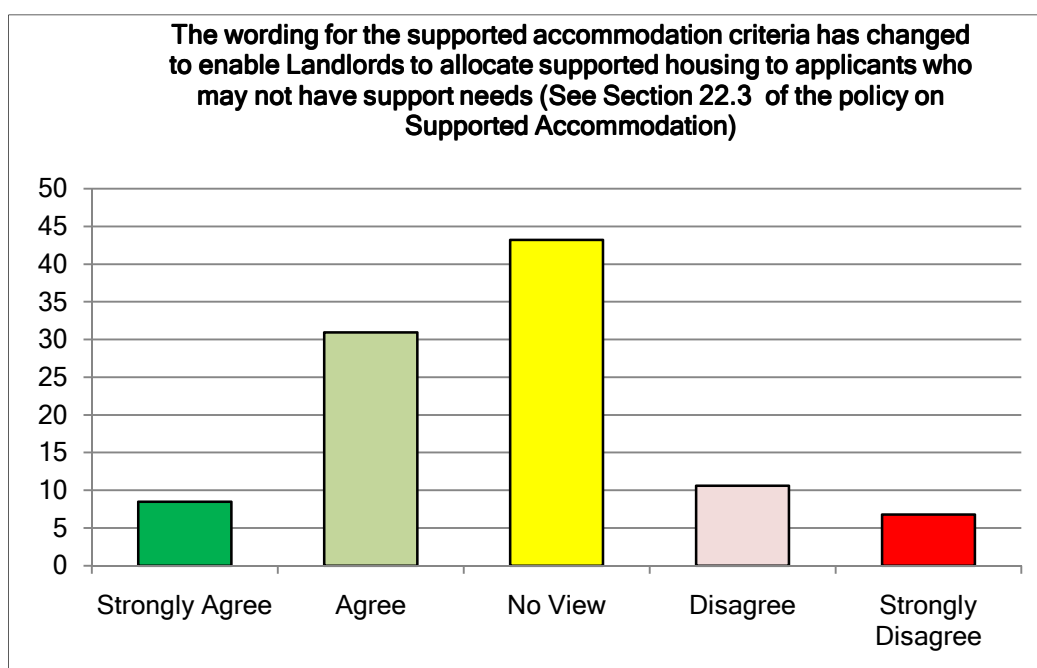
- 3.21 Q20 - Do you agree that Landlords should be able to label properties in rural areas for priority to households who have a local connection to that parish? (See Section 22.5 of the policy Local Connection)



Update

The Review group discussed this question at their meeting on the 14th December 2010 and agreed that this change should go ahead based on the responses received.

- 3.22 Q21 - The wording for the supported accommodation criteria has changed to enable Landlords to allocate supported housing to applicants who may not have support needs (See Section 22.3 of the policy on Supported Accommodation)

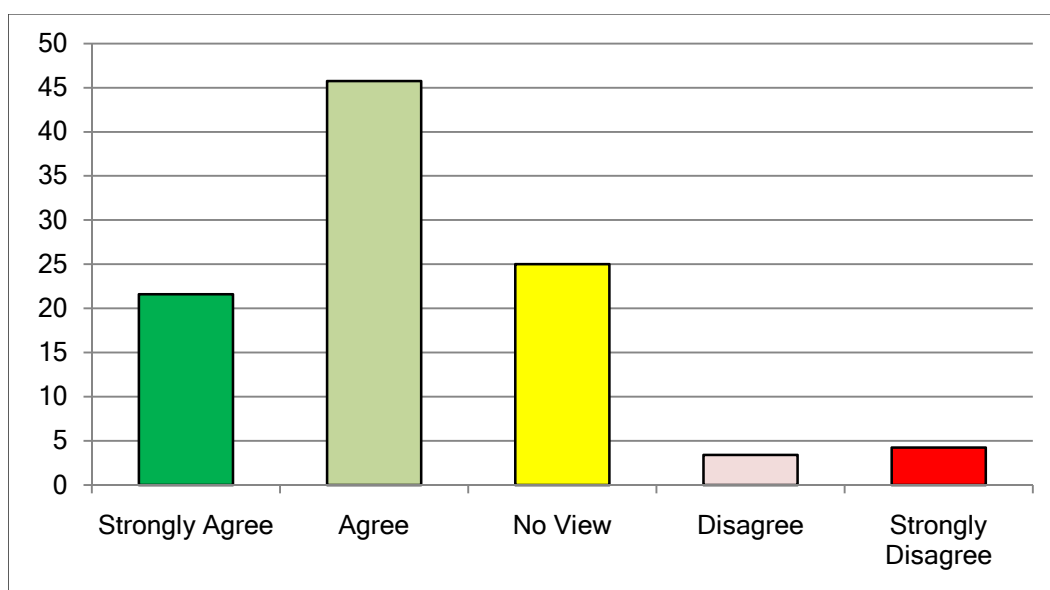


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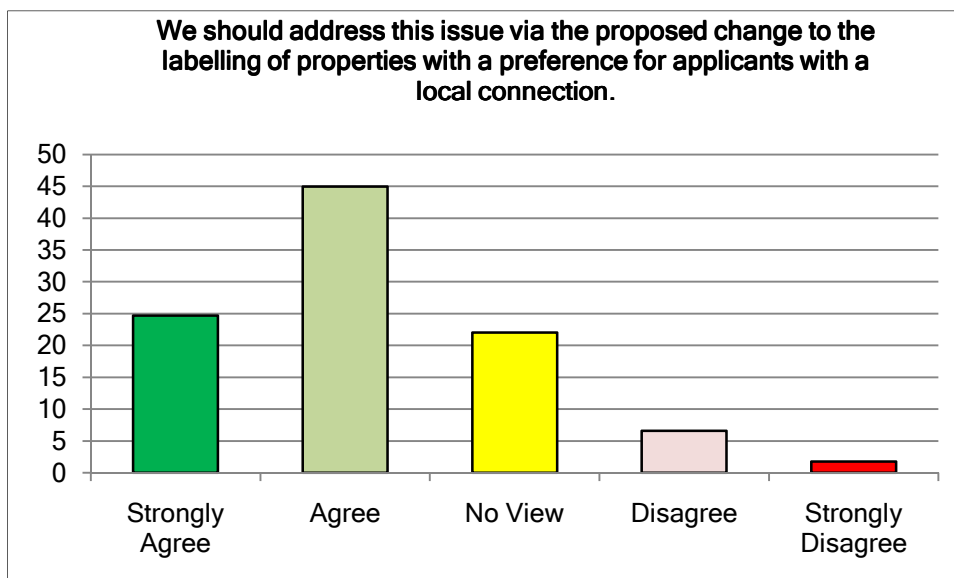
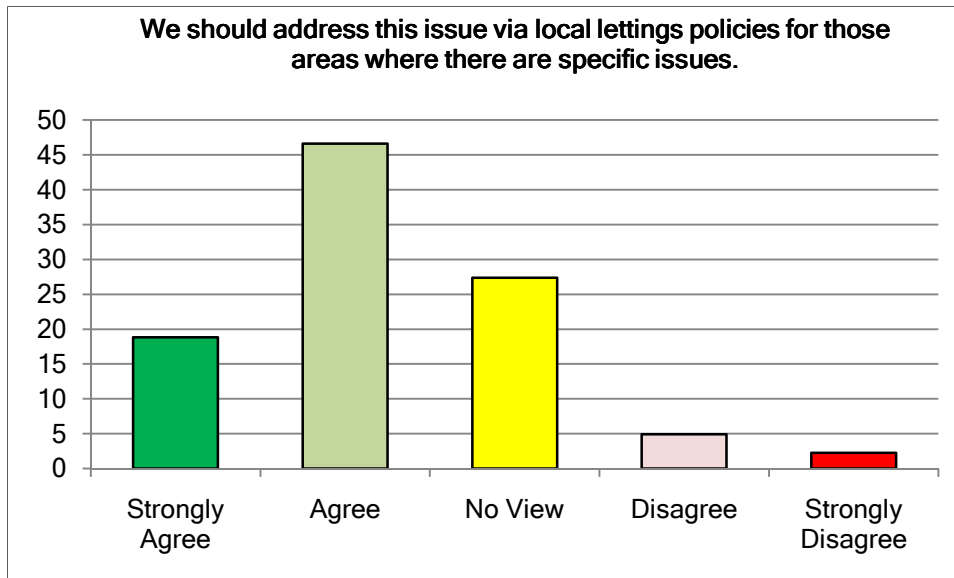
The Review group discussed this question at their meeting on the 14th December 2010 and agreed that this change should go ahead based on the responses received.

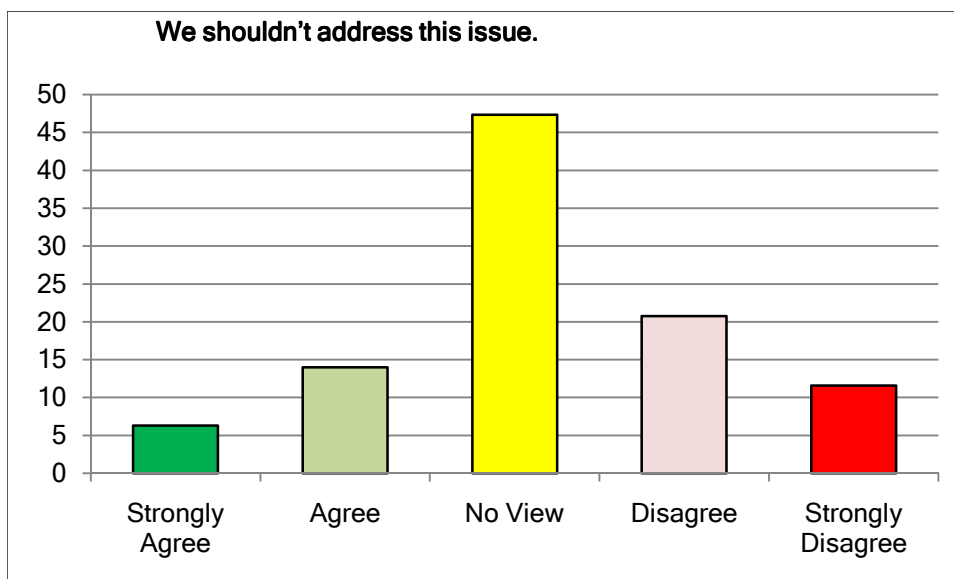
The group felt that this change may not have been understood by applicants and that the letting of supported accommodation to those without support needs is being driven by a lack of funding for support.

- 3.23 Q22 - A definition of local connection has been added to the policy for clarification - this is set out below: Although the banding system reflects housing need and subsequently the priority of each application, there may be occasions when it may be appropriate to protect housing for local people. Local connection is defined where an applicant has: Normally be resident in Homefinder Somerset. Local Government Association guidelines define this as having resided in the relevant area for six of the last twelve months, or three out of the last five years, where residence has been out of choice. In line with the Housing and Regeneration Act (2008) service personnel who have been based and living in Somerset will be considered to have a local connection with Somerset. Work in Homefinder Somerset. The Local Government Association guidelines define this as employment other than of a casual nature. For the purposes of this policy this will be defined as having had permanent work with a minimum of a 16 hour contract per week for the previous 6 months, and without a break in the period of employment for more than three months. Residency in a property where treatment or rehabilitation of any kind whilst working will not count towards establishing a local connection. Where an applicant needs to move to take up an offer of permanent employment (over 16 hours and evidence will be required) within Homefinder Somerset and commuting to their new place of work from their existing home would be unreasonable. Have family connections in Homefinder Somerset. The Local Government Association guideline define this as immediate family members (parents, siblings and non-dependent children) who have themselves lived in the area for five years and with whom there has been frequent contact, commitment or dependency. Demonstrate a need to move to Homefinder Somerset to give or receive medical or other support. Please tell us whether you agree with this definition



3.24 Q23 - We are looking at ways in which we can enable the allocation of properties in very rural areas to applicants with a local connection to that area - please give us your views on the following statements

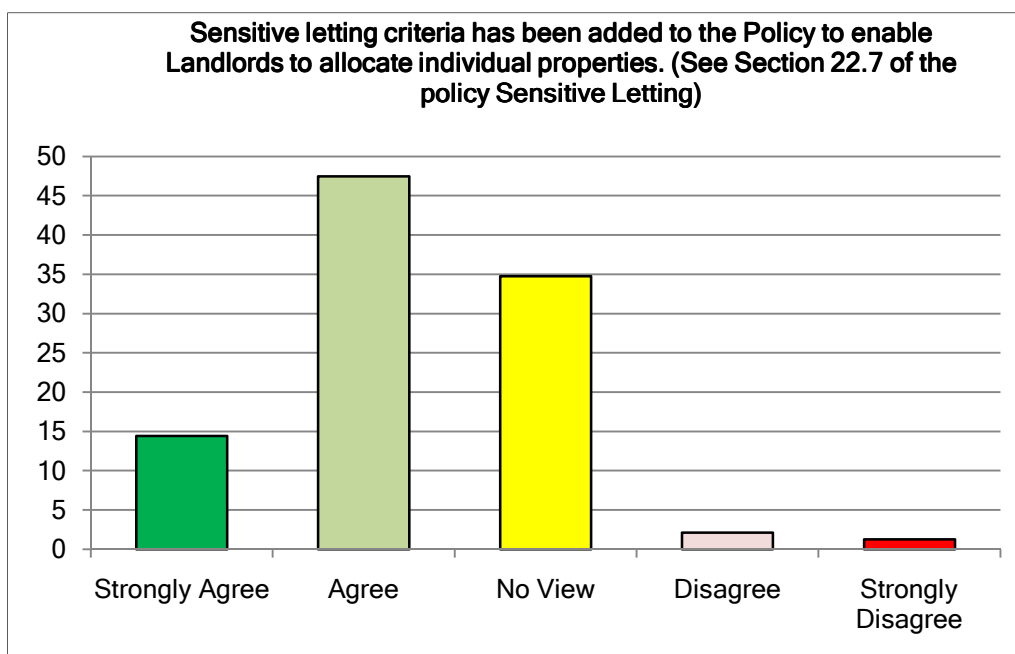




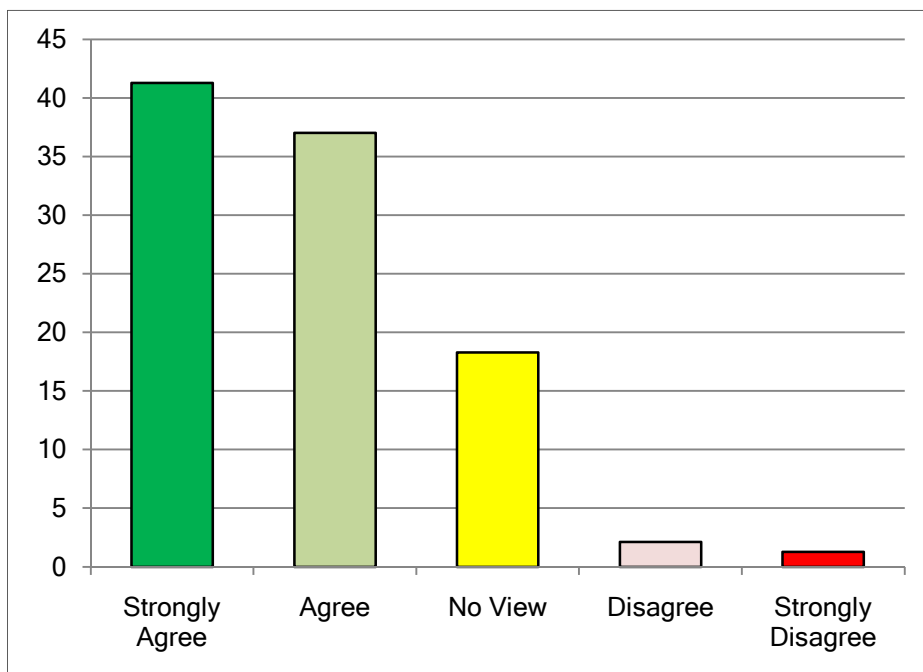
Update

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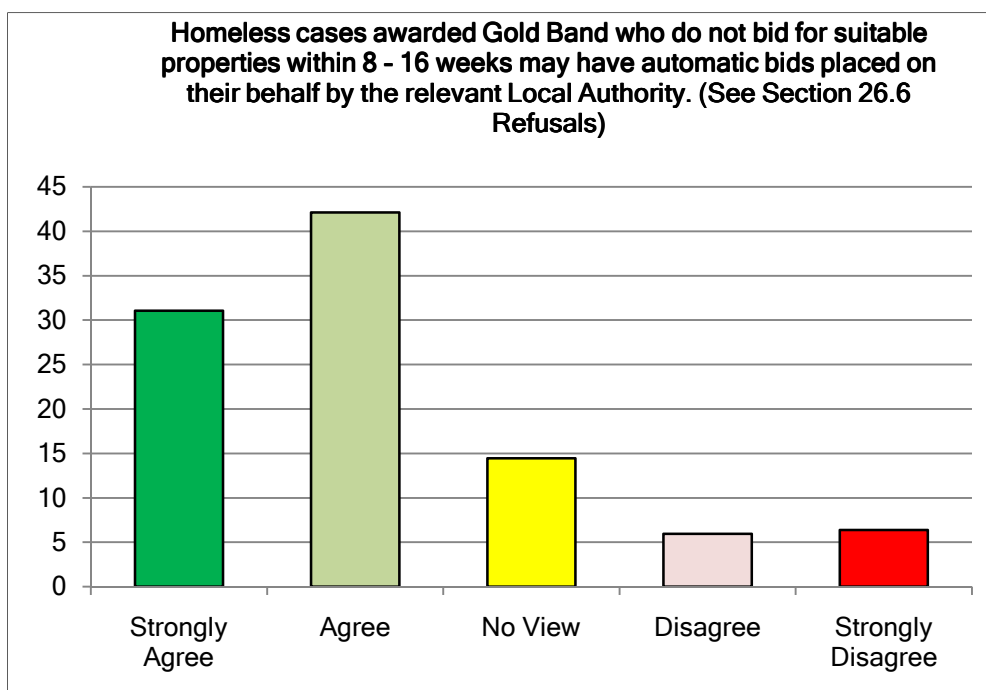
- 3.25 Q24- Sensitive letting criteria has been added to the Policy to enable Landlords to allocate individual properties. (See Section 22.7 of the policy Sensitive Letting)



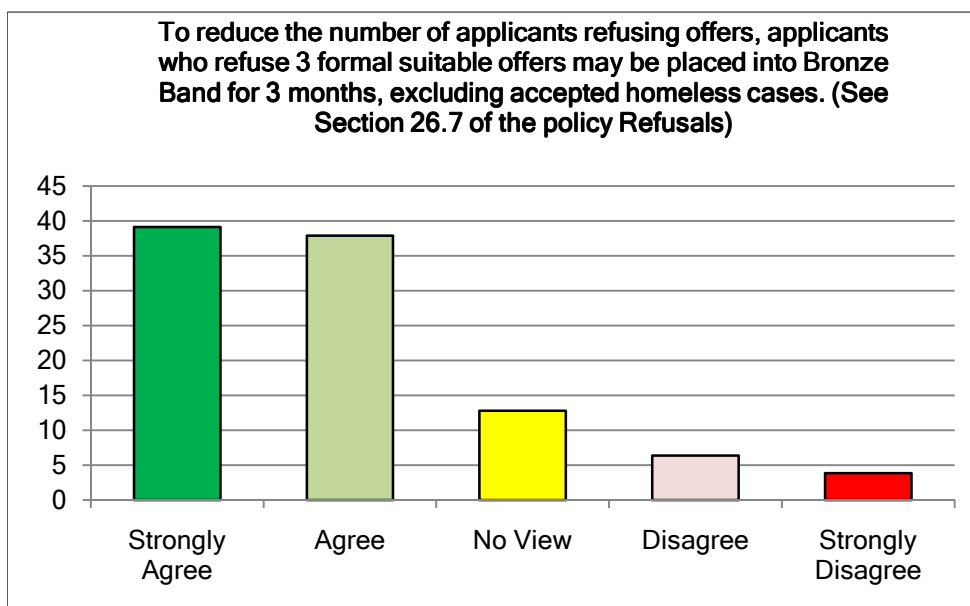
3.26 Q25 - Applicants fleeing harassment will be monitored to identify patterns of bidding. If the applicant bids for a property in the same area they are fleeing harassment from the landlord may not offer the property. (See Section 24.5 of the policy - Selection Procedure)



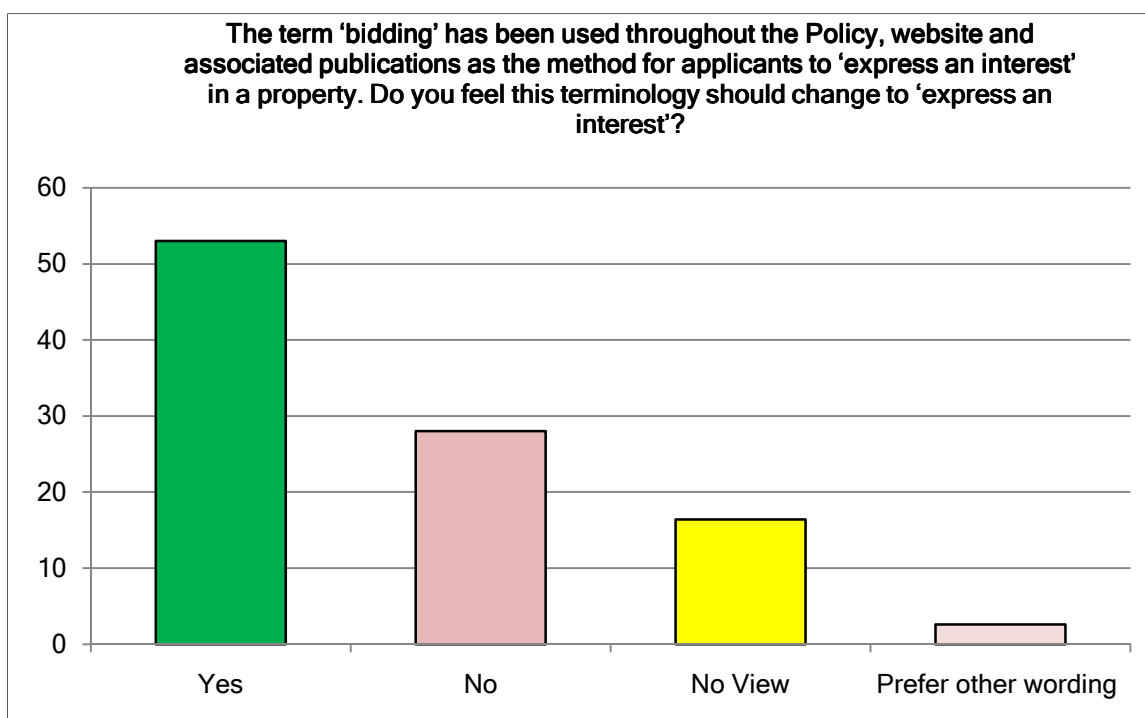
3.27 Q26 - Homeless cases awarded Gold Band who do not bid for suitable properties within 8 – 16 weeks may have automatic bids placed on their behalf by the relevant Local Authority. (See Section 26.6 Refusals)



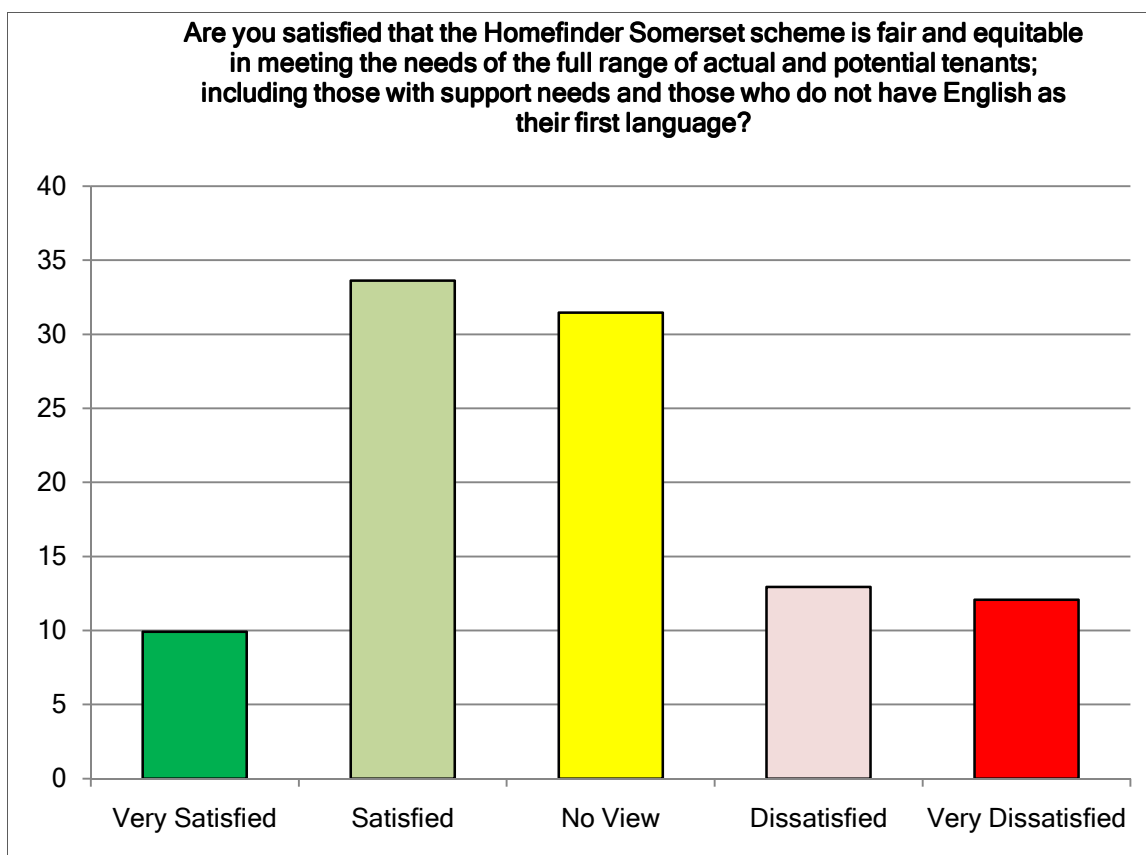
3.28 Q27 - To reduce the number of applicants refusing offers, applicants who refuse 3 formal suitable offers may be placed into Bronze Band for 3 months, excluding accepted homeless cases. (See Section 26.7 of the policy Refusals)



3.29 Q28 - The term 'bidding' has been used throughout the Policy, website and associated publications as the method for applicants to 'express an interest' in a property.



3.30 Q29 - Are you satisfied that the Homefinder Somerset scheme is fair and equitable in meeting the needs of the full range of actual and potential tenants; including those with support needs and those who do not have English as their first language?

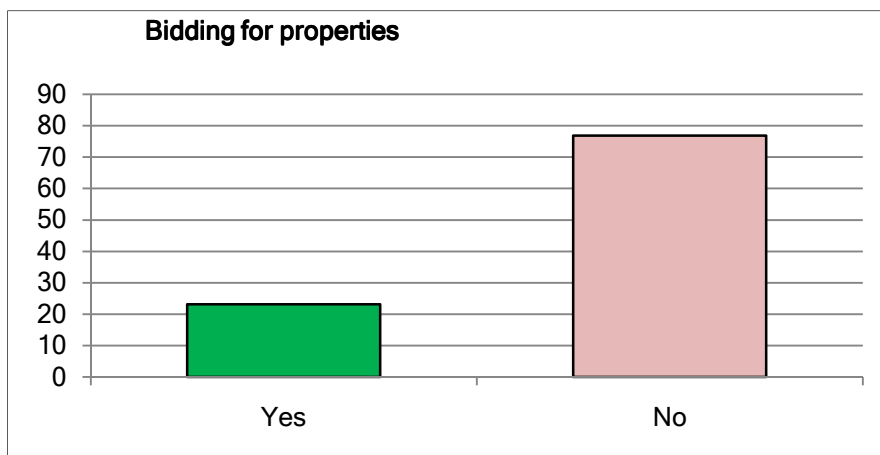
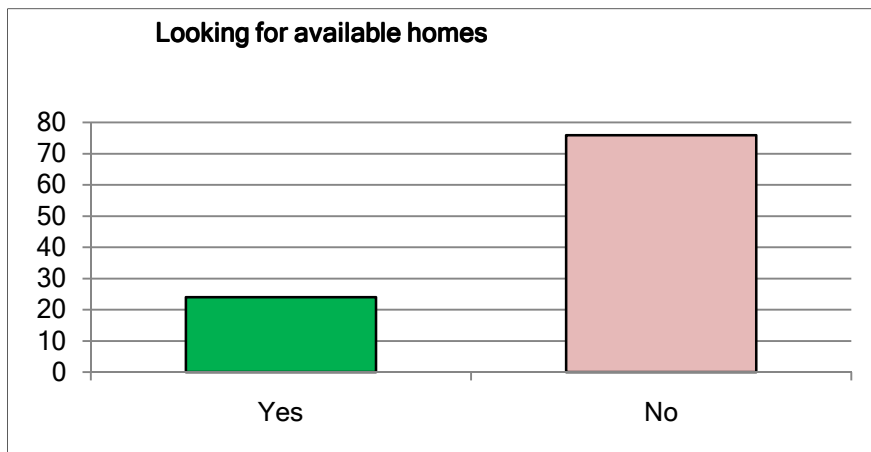
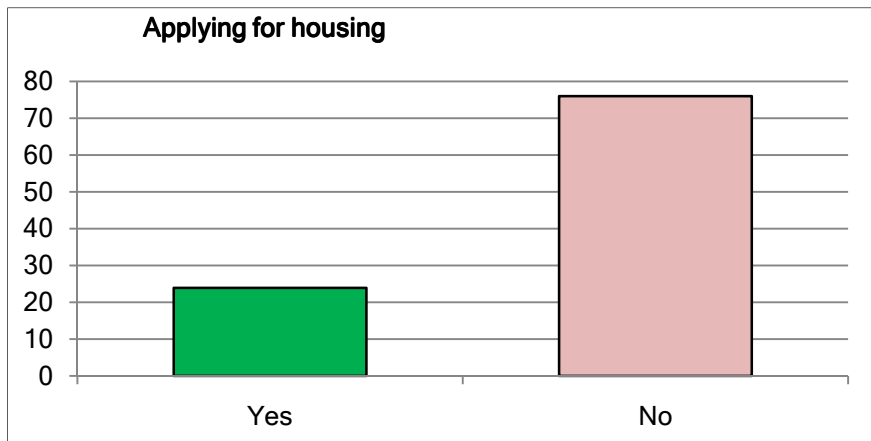


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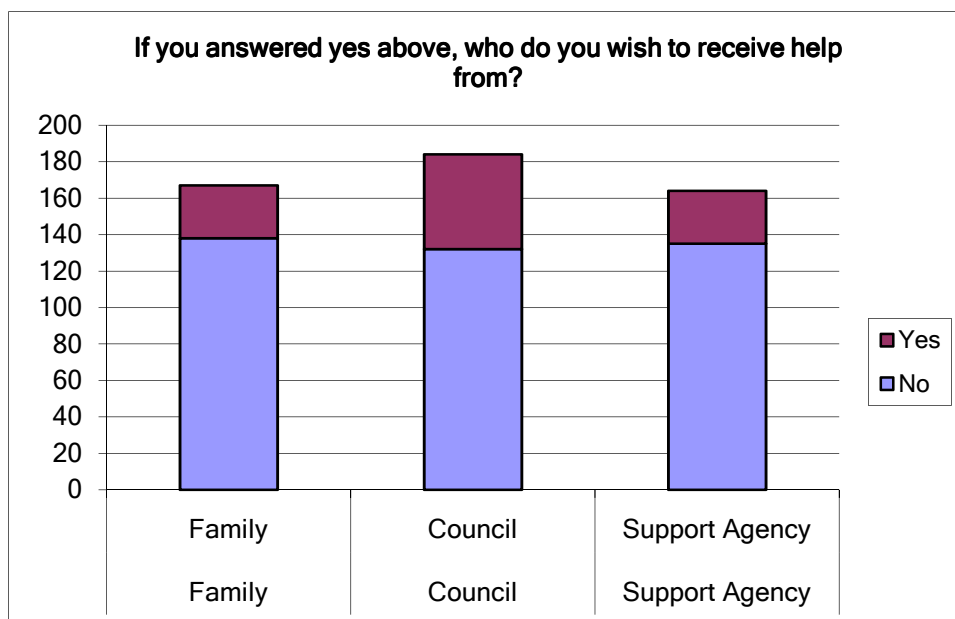
The Review group discussed this question at their meeting on the 14th December 2010 and agreed that this change should go ahead based on the responses received.

In addition the comments received from applicants would be taken into account by the Equality and Diversity working group of the Homefinder Somerset Monitoring Board and fed into the new Equalities Impact Assessment for the revised draft policy.

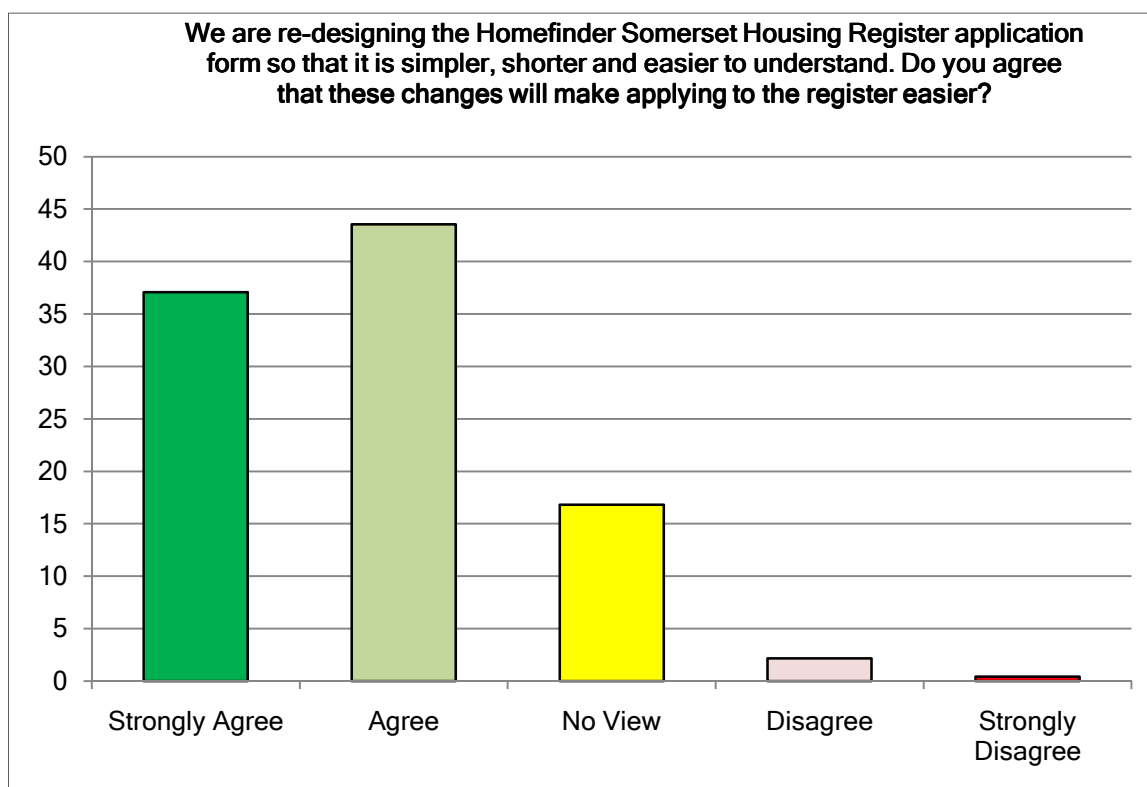
3.31 Q30 – If you are a vulnerable applicant do you require help with the following:



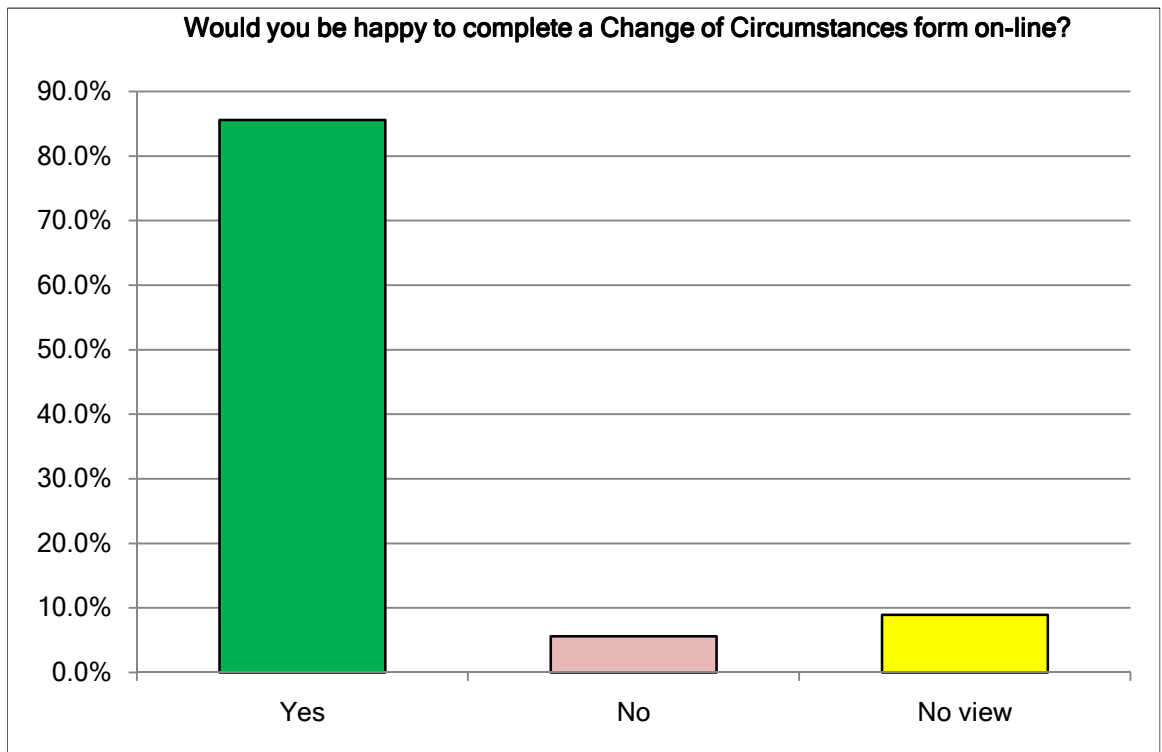
Q31 – If you answered yes above – who do wish to receive help from?



3.32 Q32 We are re-designing the Homefinder Somerset Housing Register application form so that it is simpler, shorter and easier to understand. Do you agree that these changes will make applying to the register easier?



3.33 Would you be happy to complete a Change of Circumstances form on-line?



4.0 Detailed Stakeholder Consultation Responses

4.1 Q1 – Who responded:

	SSDC	SDC	MDC	TDBC	WSC	Affinity Sutton	English Churches Housing Group
Other (e.g. forum response)	3	0	1	0	1	0	0
South Somerset DC	9	0	0	0	1	0	0
Mendip DC	0	0	8	0	0	0	0
Taunton Deane BC	0	0	1	3	0	0	0
West Somerset Council	0	0	0	0	4	0	0
Sedgemoor DC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Landlord (Please select)	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	Flourish	Guinness/Kennet	Hanover	Hastoe HA	Knightstone HA	Magna (West Somerset)	Places For People (Bristol Churches)
Other (e.g. forum response)	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
South Somerset DC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mendip DC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Taunton Deane BC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Somerset Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sedgemoor DC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Landlord (Please select)	2	1	1	1	6	5	1
	Raglan HA Ltd	Redland HA	Sanctuary HA	SHAL	Signpost HA	Stonham HA	Taunton association for the homeless
Other (e.g. forum response)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Somerset DC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mendip DC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Taunton Deane BC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Somerset Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sedgemoor DC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Landlord (Please select)	1	1	1	1	0	3	1

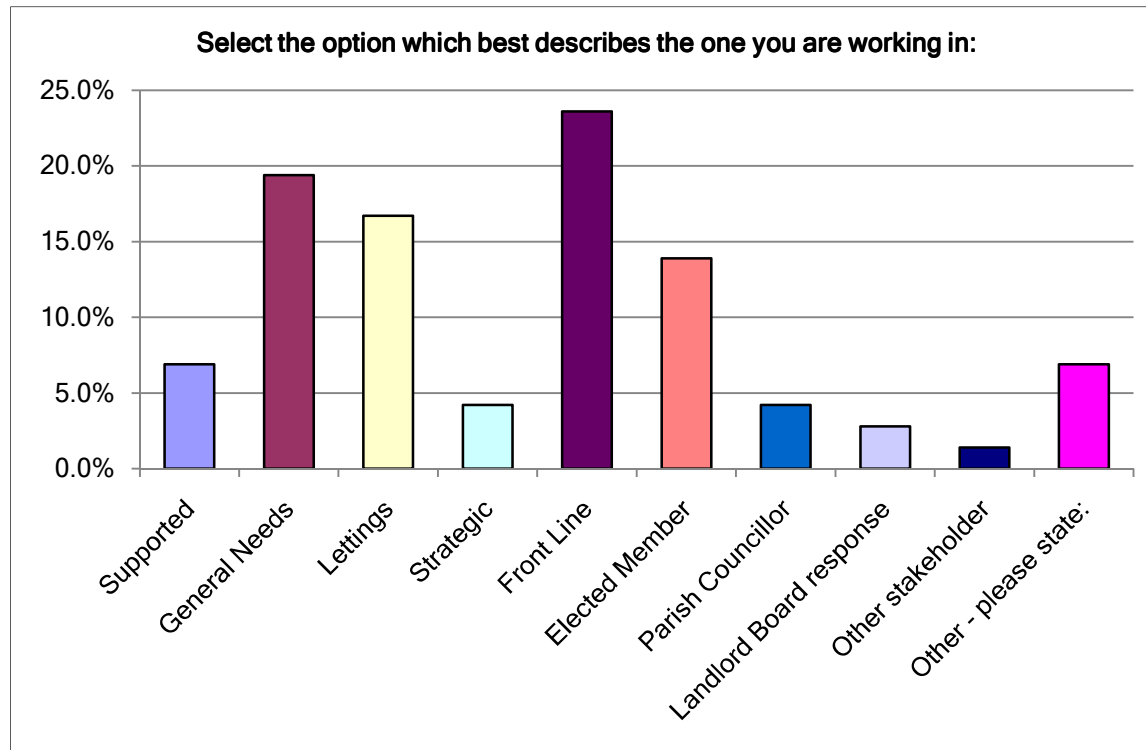
Homefinder Somerset Allocations Policy Consultation Response Summary

	Taunton Deane Borough Council	The Abbeyfield Taunton Society	Western Challenge HA	Yarlington Homes	Total Responses	%age
Other (e.g. forum response)	0	0	0	0	7	9.1
South Somerset DC	0	0	0	0	10	13.0
Mendip DC	0	0	0	0	8	10.4
Taunton Deane BC	3	0	0	0	7	9.1
West Somerset Council	0	0	0	0	4	5.2
Sedgemoor DC	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Landlord (Please select)	7	1	1	5	41	53.2

Those that stated 'other' as their organisation type were as follows:

Also Wyvern Rural HA (now Hastoe Wyvern HA)
Leaving Care Team Children's Social Care
Crowcombe
Taunton Women's Aid
Knightstone Housing Association
West Somerset Housing forum
Mendip YMCA
Magna West Somerset Tenants' Panel
Parish Council

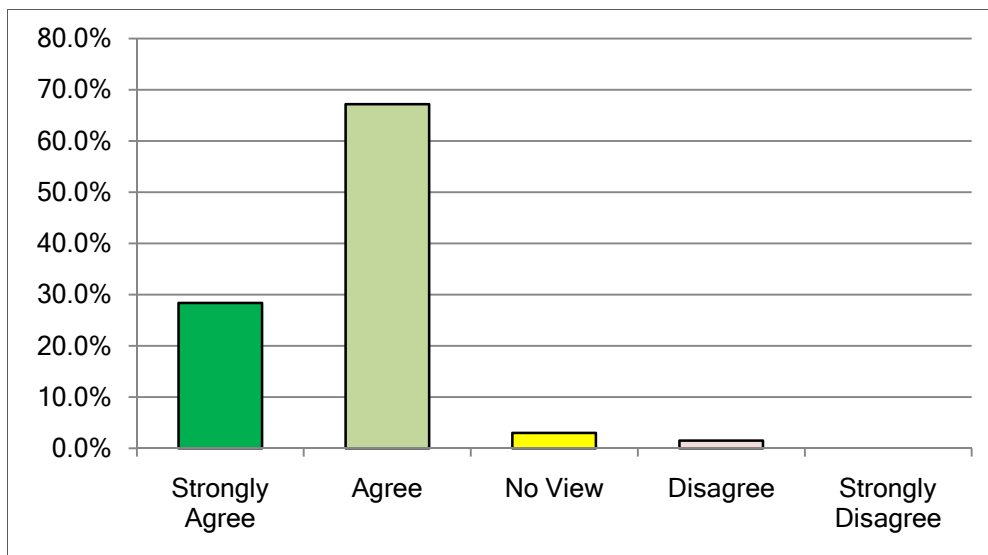
4.2 Q2 – Which area do you work in?



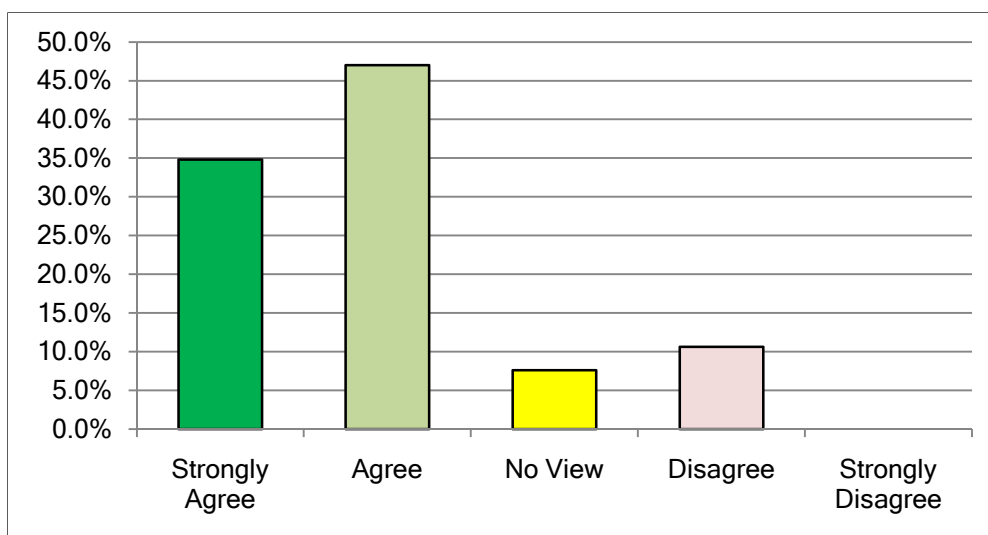
Those that stated 'other' listed their role as follows:

Leaving Care.
Retirement Housing
Housing register team
West somerset housing forum
Supported Housing and Homeless Services including Mediation, Emergency Accommodation, Resettlement Support

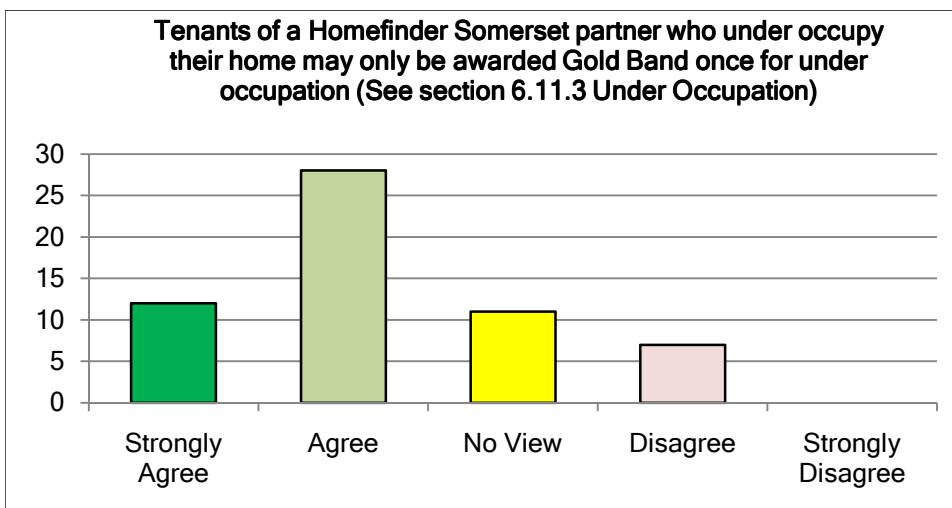
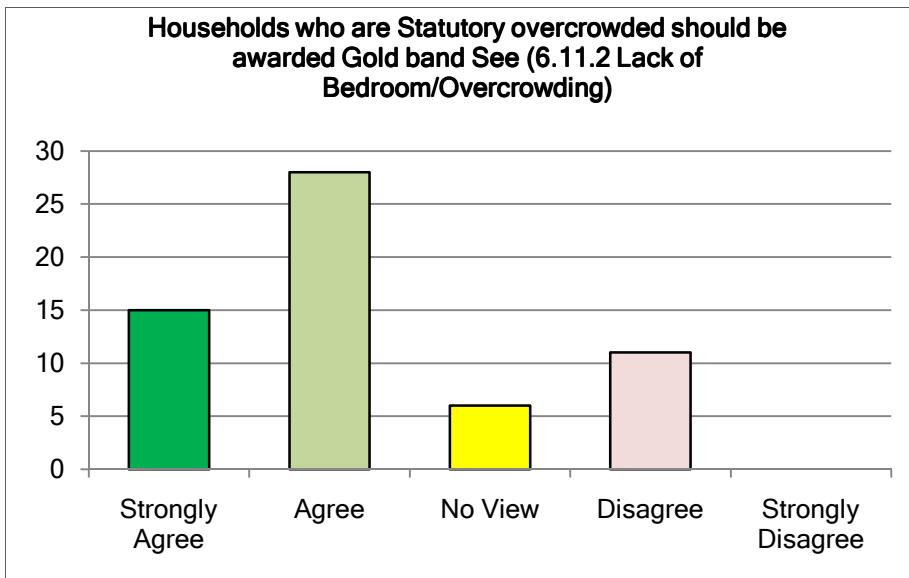
4.3 Q3 – Should housing register staff be assessing a household’s finances to identify whether they have sufficient income or savings to be able to afford alternative housing? (See Section 6.2 – 6.10 of the revised policy – Applicants Financial Resources)

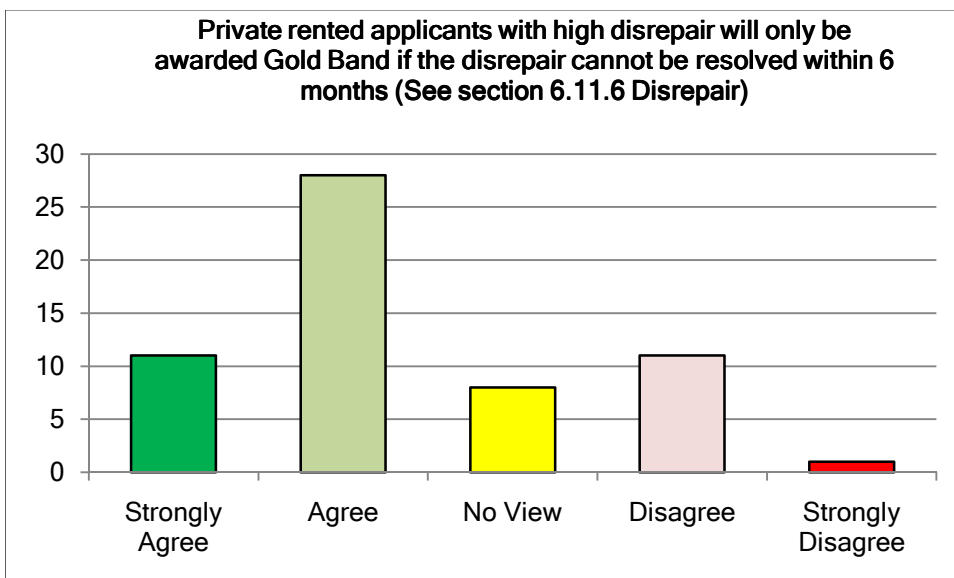
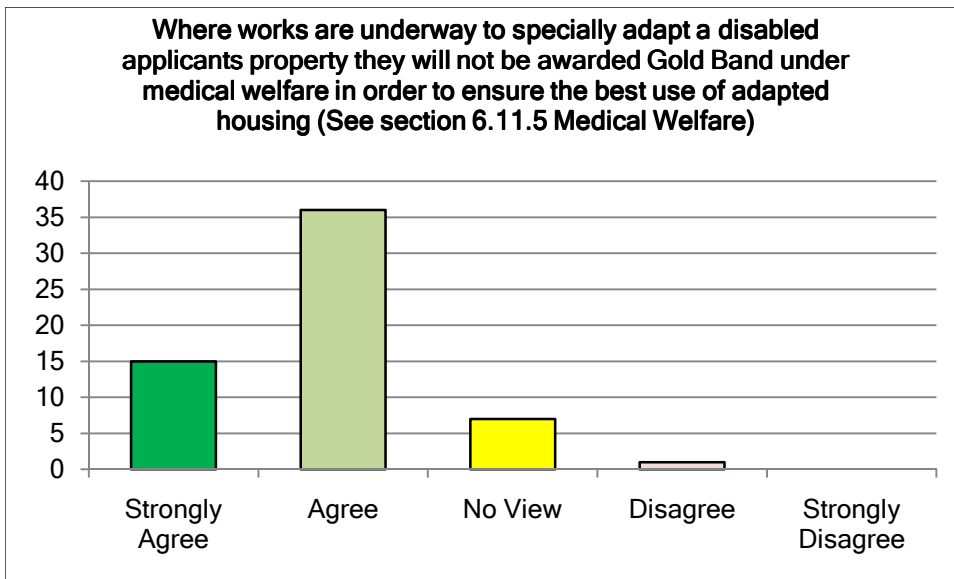


4.4 Q4 - If an applicant bids and accepts a property knowing that it does not meet their housing needs, and subsequently reappplies for housing then they will be placed into a lower band, unless there is a change in circumstance. (See Section 6.11-Banding Criteria)

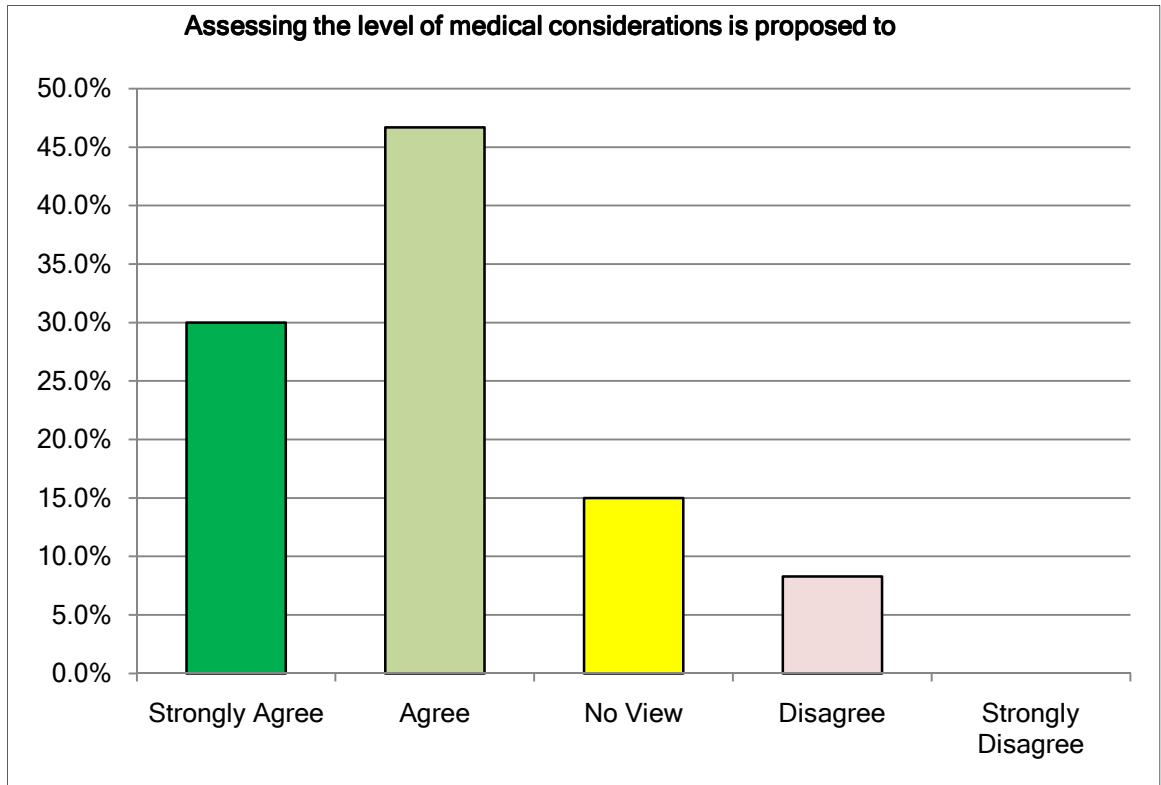


4.5 Q5 To what extent do you agree/disagree with the proposed changes to the Gold Band assessment criteria set out below.

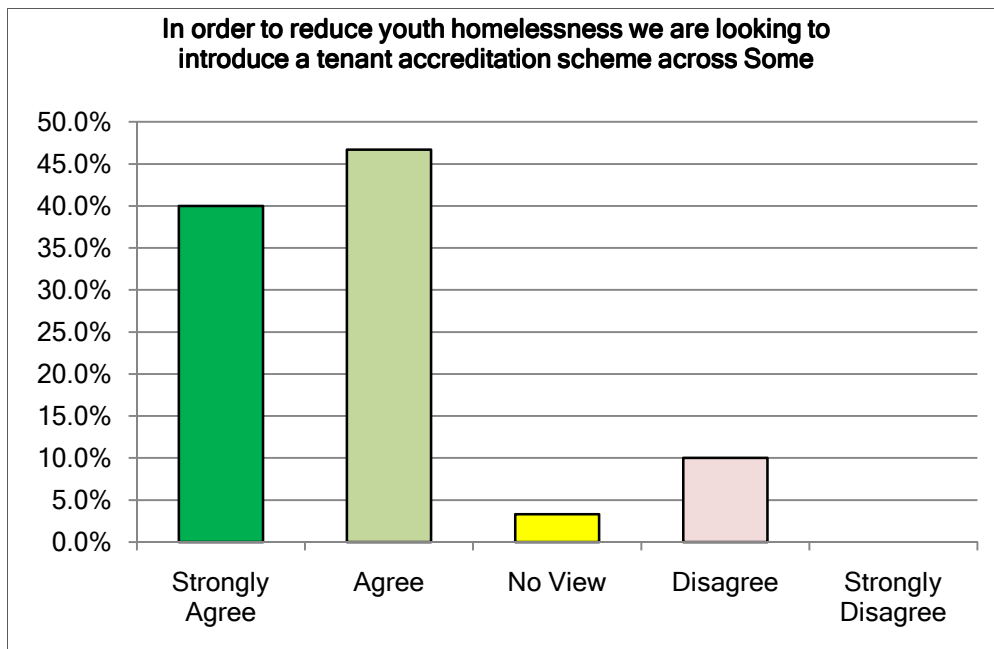




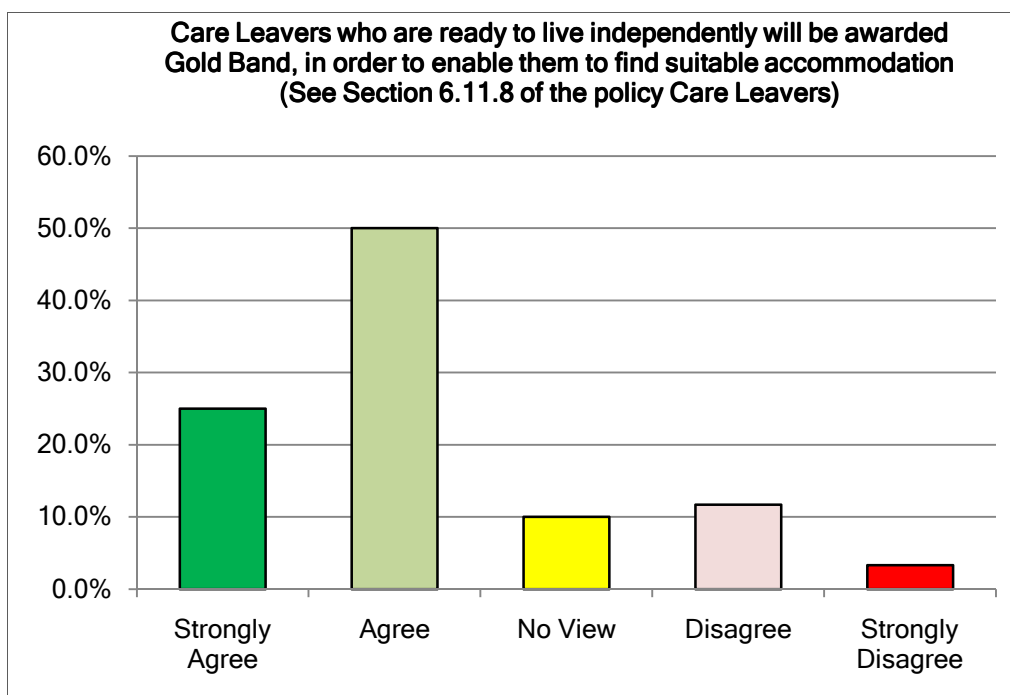
4.6 Q6 Assessing the level of medical considerations is proposed to change. Gold Band criteria will change from Life Threatening to Serious medical conditions and the Silver Band criteria will be reduced from Significant to Moderate medical conditions. (See Section 14 – 14.5 Medical Assessments & Appendix 2 of the policy)



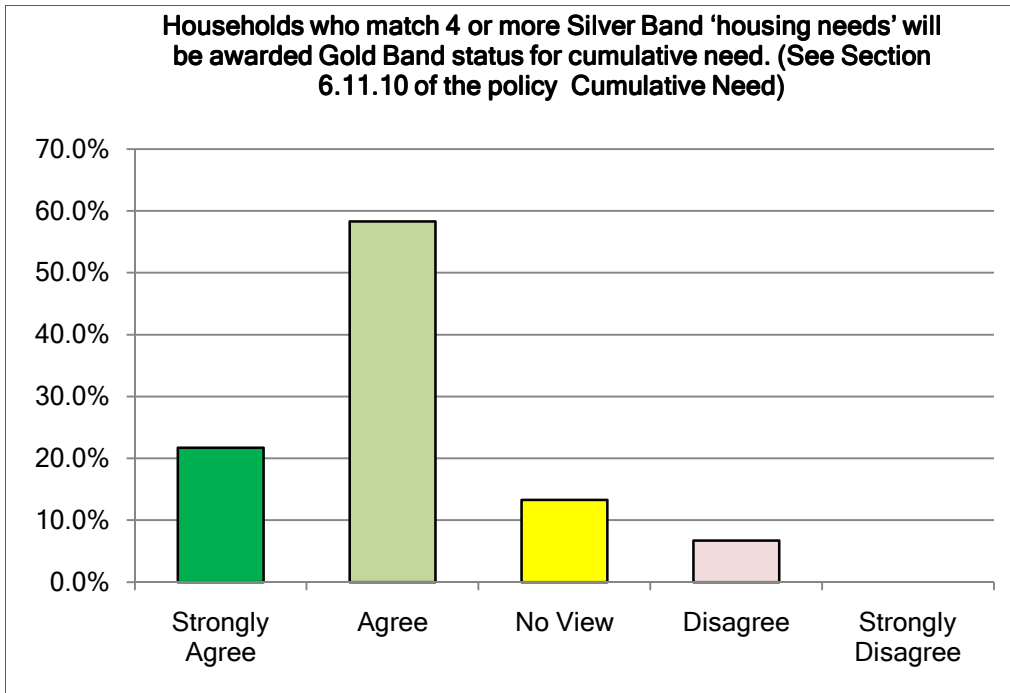
4.7 Q7 In order to reduce youth homelessness we are looking to introduce a tenant accreditation scheme across Somerset. This scheme will provide young people with the necessary life skills to sustain new tenancies. Some properties may be advertised with preference given to those applicants that have completed the accreditation course. Do you agree with this proposal?



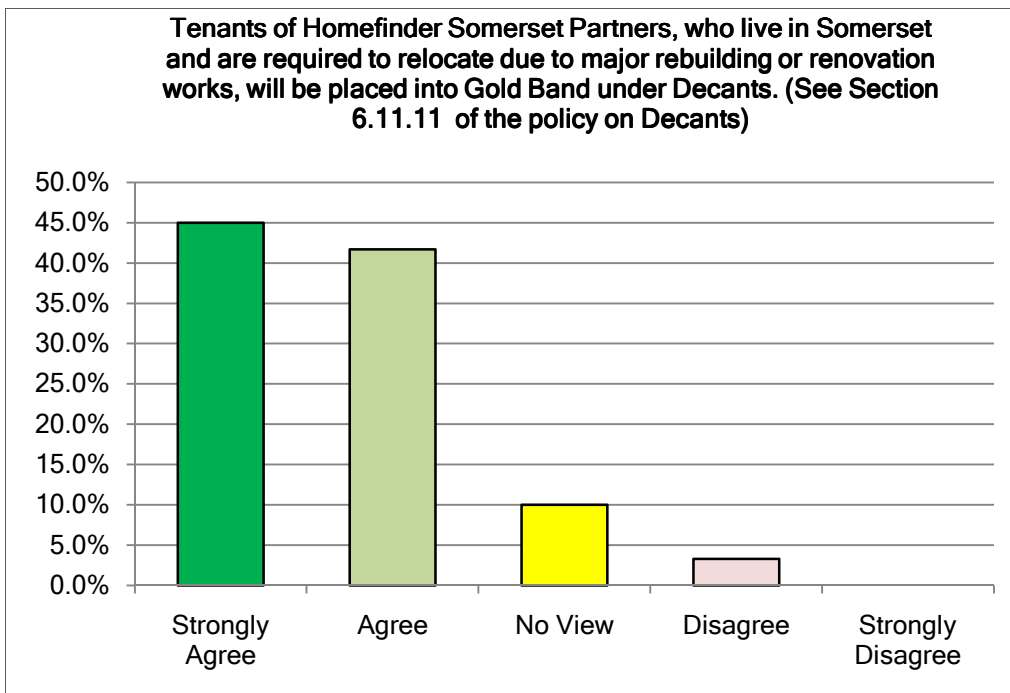
4.8 Q8 Care Leavers who are ready to live independently will be awarded Gold Band, in order to enable them to find suitable accommodation (See Section 6.11.8 of the policy Care Leavers)



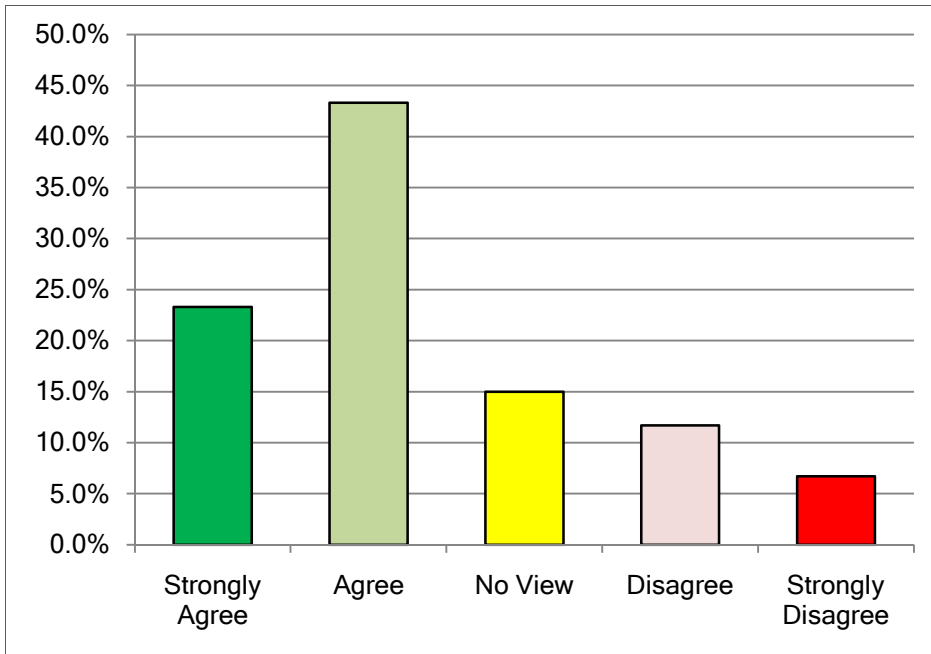
4.9 Q9 Households who match 4 or more Silver Band 'housing needs' will be awarded Gold Band status for cumulative need. (See Section 6.11.10 of the policy Cumulative Need)



4.10 Q10 Tenants of Homefinder Somerset Partners, who live in Somerset and are required to relocate due to major rebuilding or renovation works, will be placed into Gold Band under Decants. (See Section 6.11.11 of the policy on Decants)



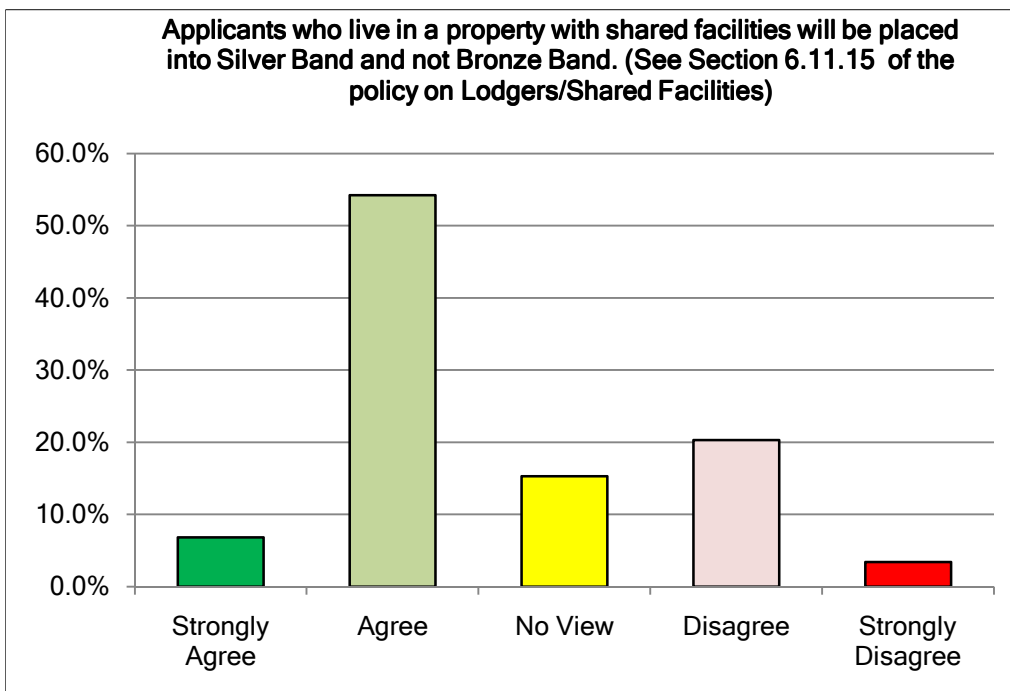
4.11 Q11 On occasions Homefinder Somerset Landlords may need to award Gold Band to applicants who have been left in a property but have no legal right to remain there: to what extent do you agree they should be placed into Gold Band to help them move? (See Section 6.11.12 the policy on Tenancy Succession)



Update

The Review group discussed this question at their meeting on the 14th December 2010 and agreed that this change should go ahead based on the responses received.

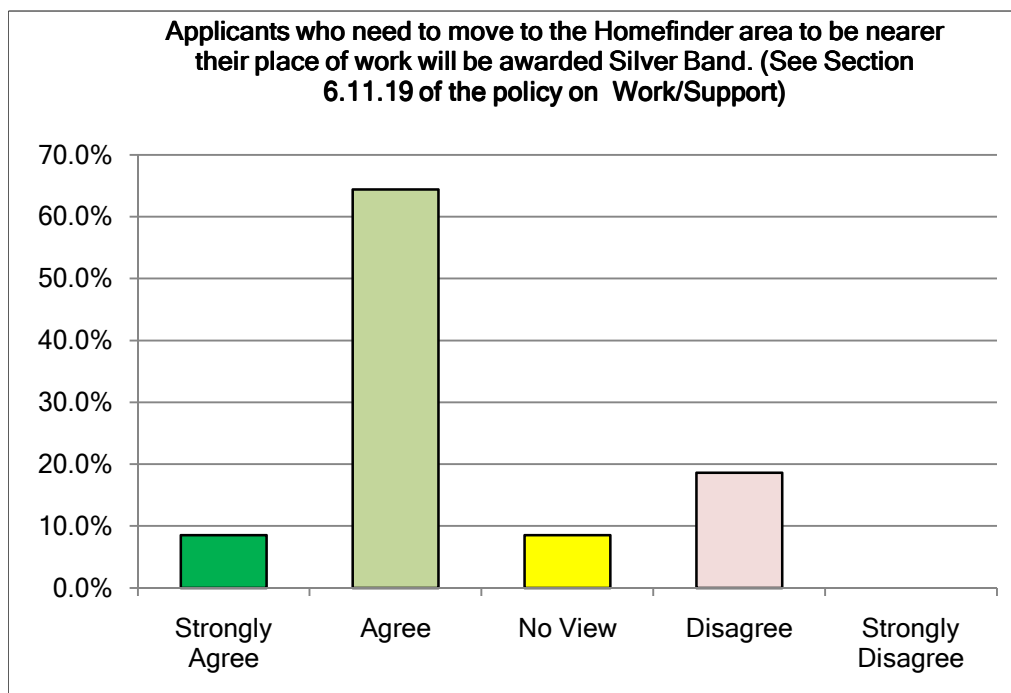
4.12 Q12 Applicants who live in a property with shared facilities will be placed into Silver Band and not Bronze Band. (See Section 6.11.15 of the policy on Lodgers/Shared Facilities)



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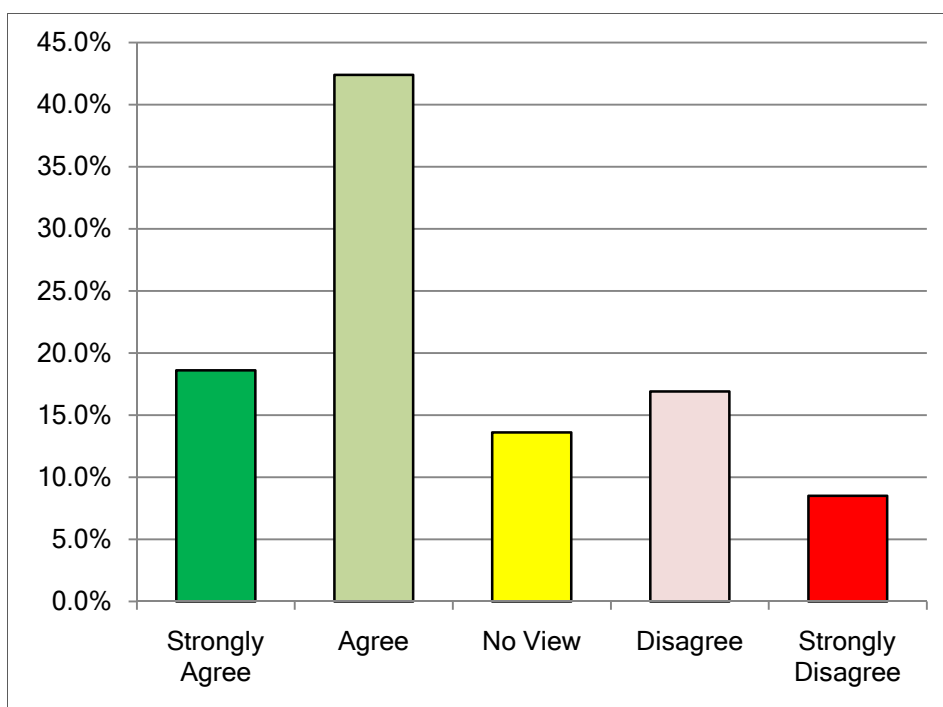
4.13 Q13 Applicants who need to move to the Homefinder area to be nearer their place of work will be awarded Silver Band. (See Section 6.11.19 of the policy on Work/Support)



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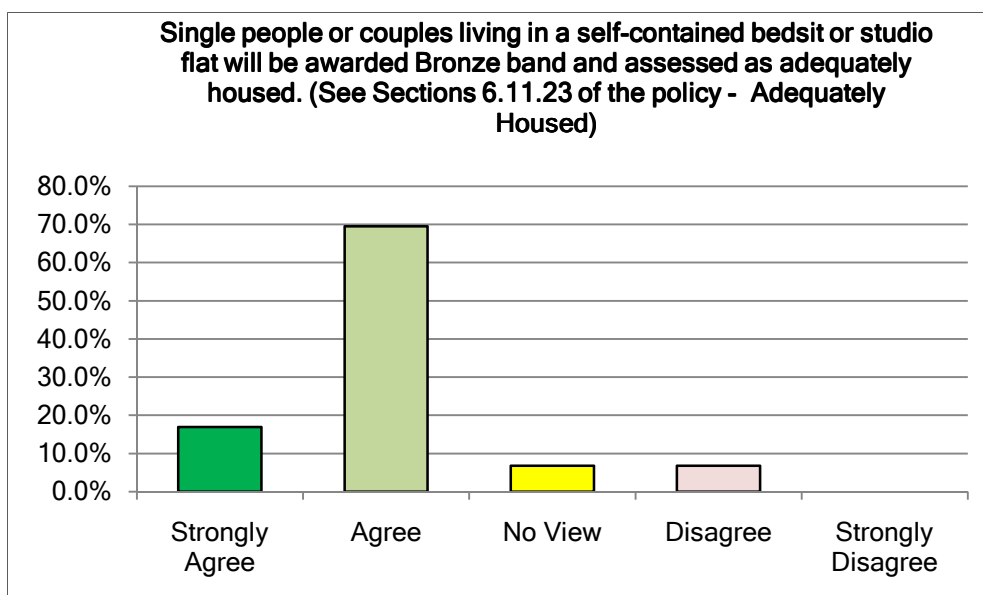
4.14 Q14 We intend to remove the priority given to households with children under 10, with no access to an enclosed garden as a consideration for any housing (so they do not have the same priority as applicants who are homeless) (See Sections 6.11.22 & 6.11.17 of the policy - Other Homeless & Gardens).



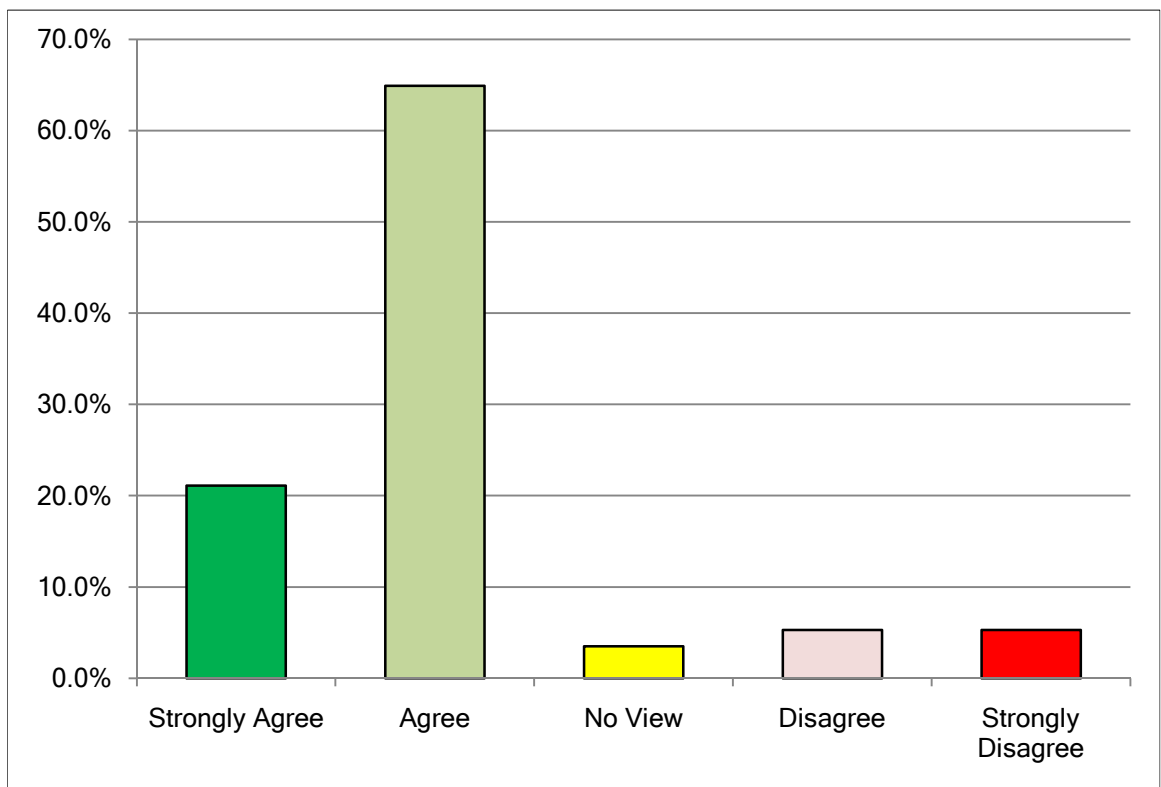
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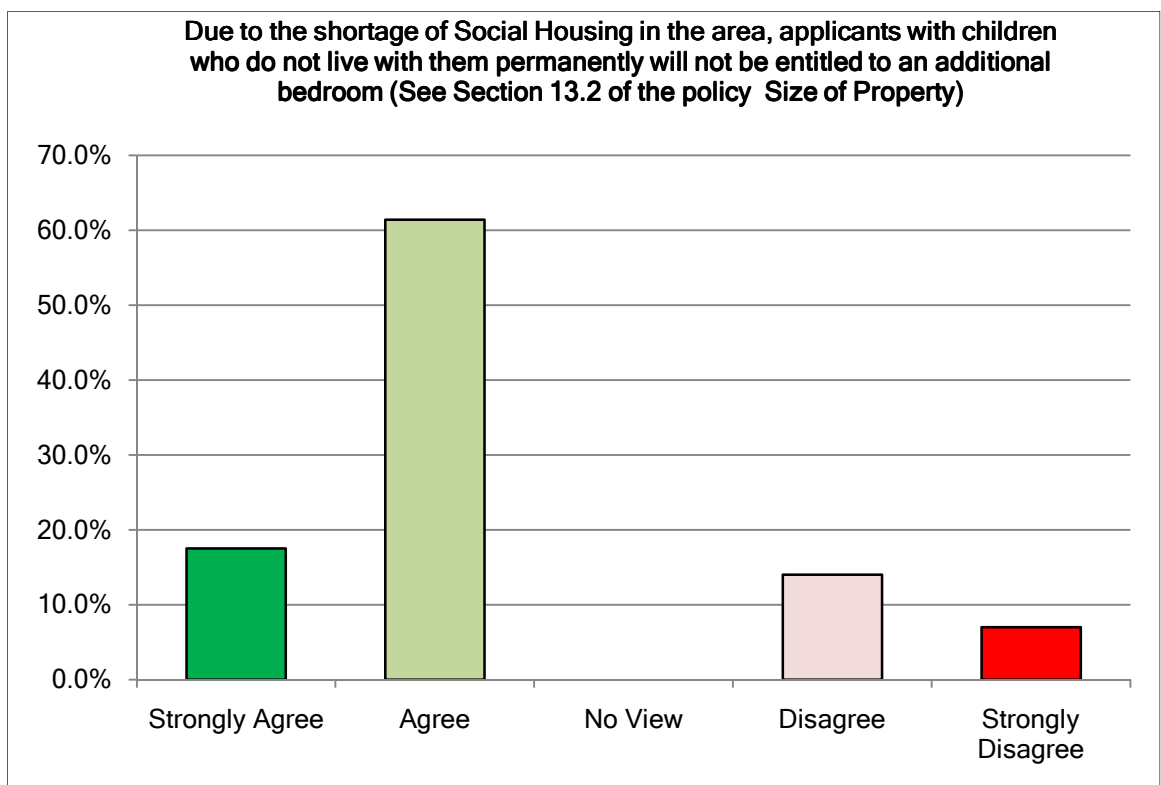
4.15 Q15 Single people or couples living in a self-contained bedsit or studio flat will be awarded Bronze band and assessed as adequately housed. (See Sections 6.11.23 of the policy - Adequately Housed)



4.16 Q16 The way that we will assess bedroom need has changed slightly etc.



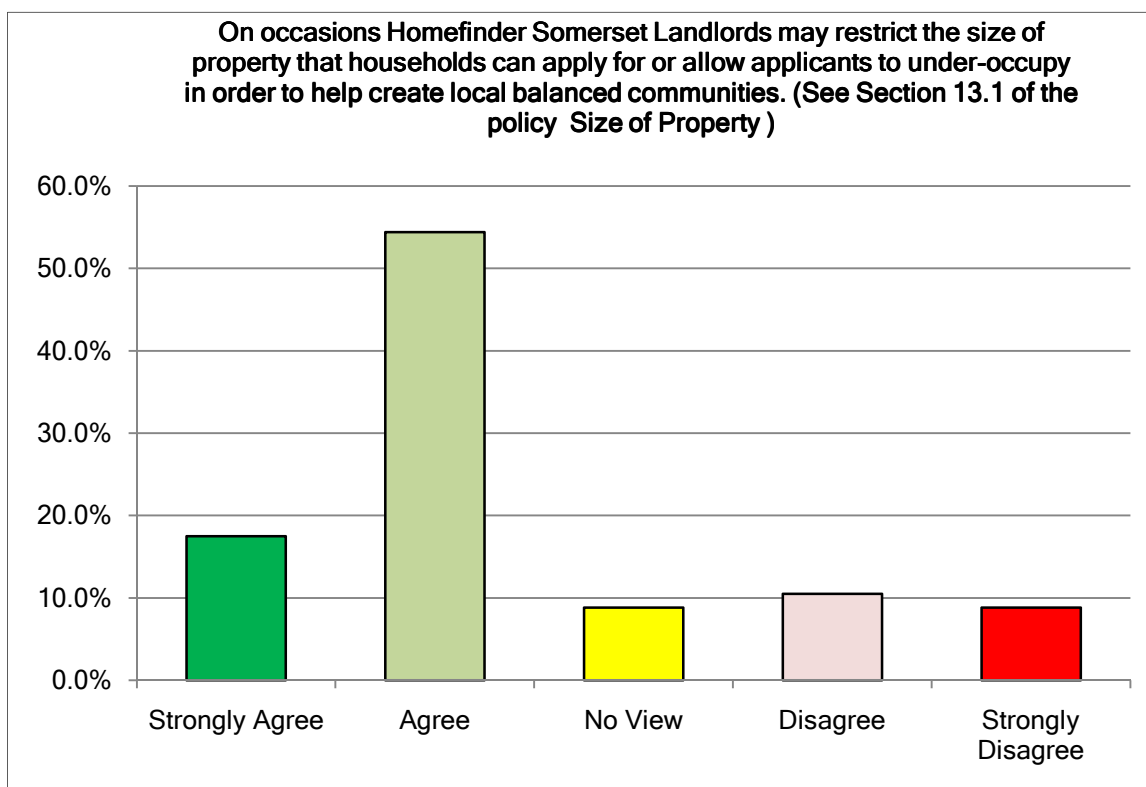
4.17 Q17 Due to the shortage of Social Housing in the area, applicants with children who do not live with them permanently will not be entitled to an additional bedroom (See Section 13.2 of the policy Size of Property)



Update

The Review group discussed this question at their meeting on the 14th December 2010 and agreed that this change should go ahead based on the responses received.

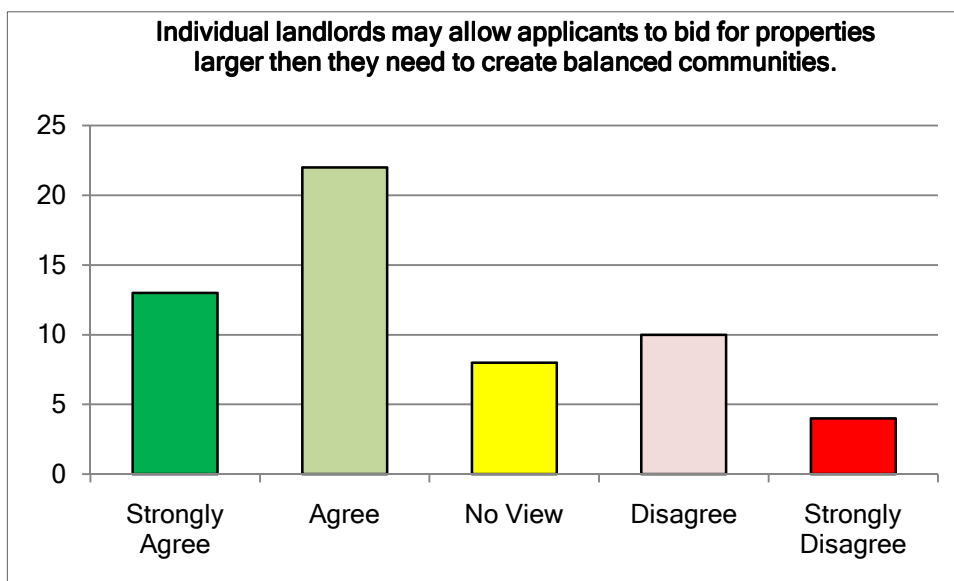
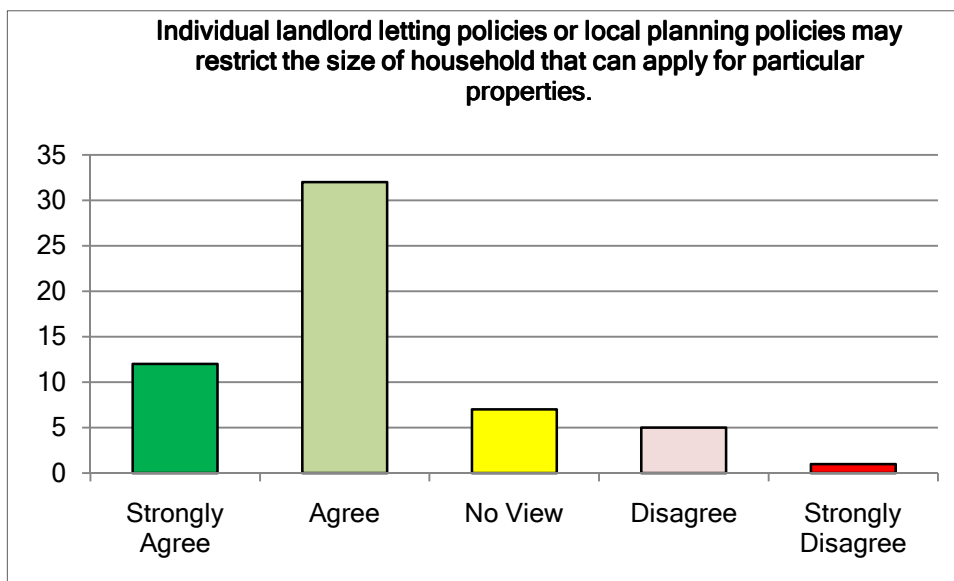
4.18 Q18 On occasions Homefinder Somerset Landlords may restrict the size of property that households can apply for or allow applicants to under-occupy in order to help create local balanced communities. (See Section 13.1 of the policy Size of Property)



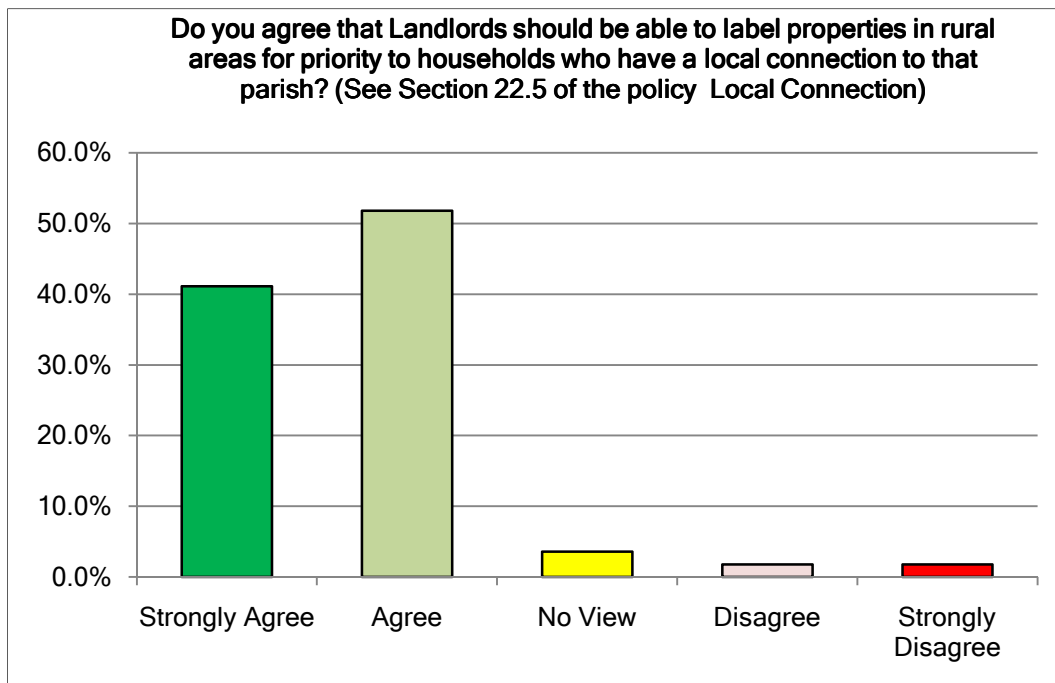
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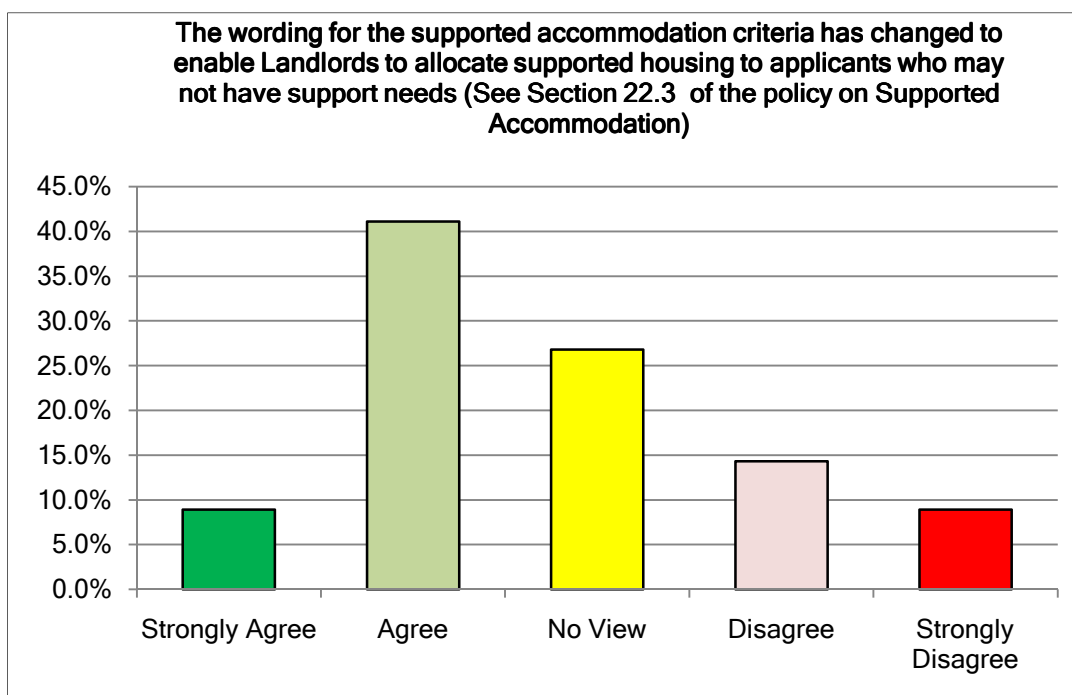
4.19 Q19 To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements regarding the size of property applicants can apply for:



4.20 Q20 Do you agree that Landlords should be able to label properties in rural areas for priority to households who have a local connection to that parish? (See Section 22.5 of the policy Local Connection)



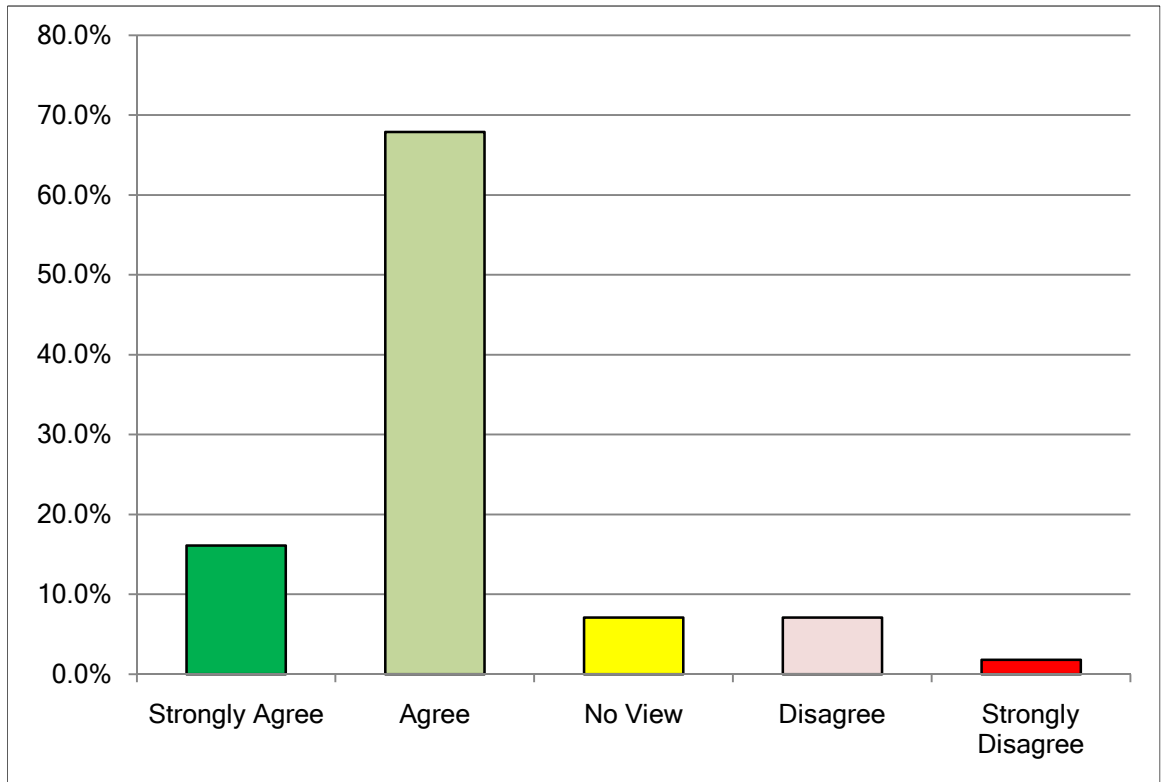
4.21 Q21 The wording for the supported accommodation criteria has changed to enable Landlords to allocate supported housing to applicants who may not have support needs (See Section 22.3 of the policy on Supported Accommodation)



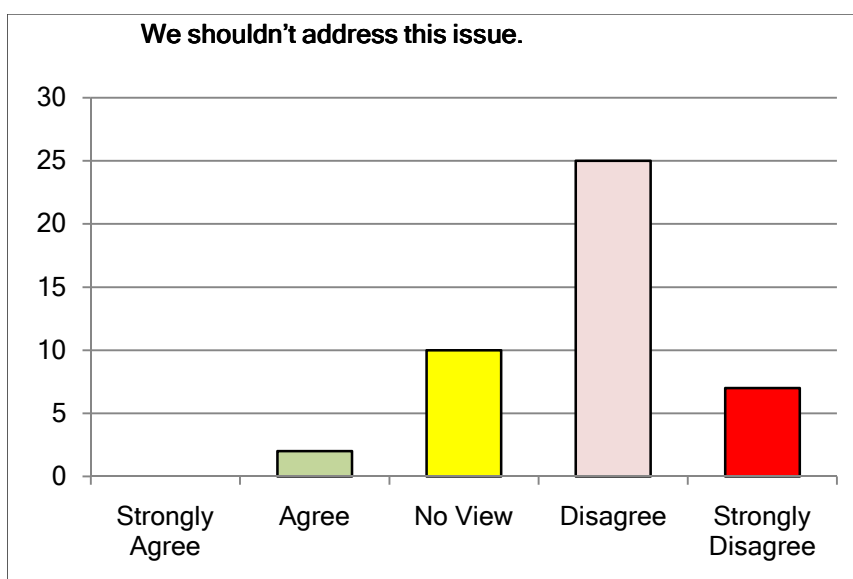
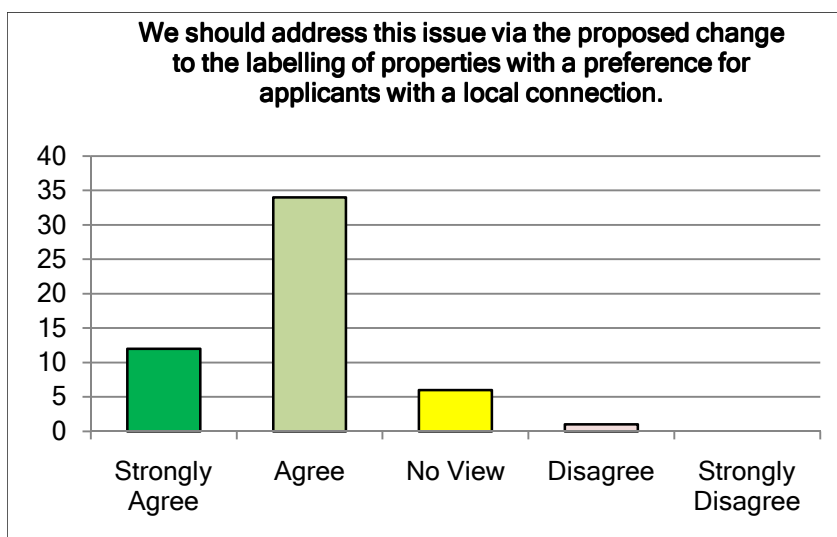
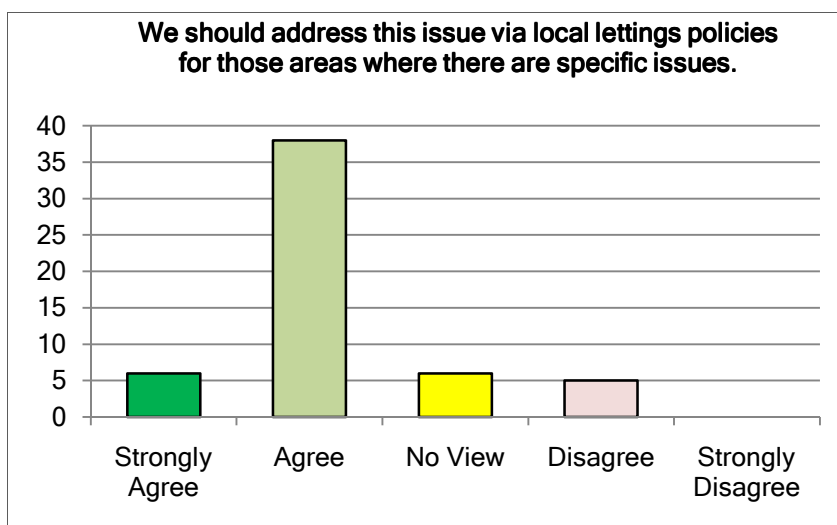
Update

The Review group discussed this question at their meeting on the 14th December 2010 and agreed that this change should go ahead based on the responses received.

4.22 Q22 A definition of local connection has been added to the policy for clarification - this is set out below:



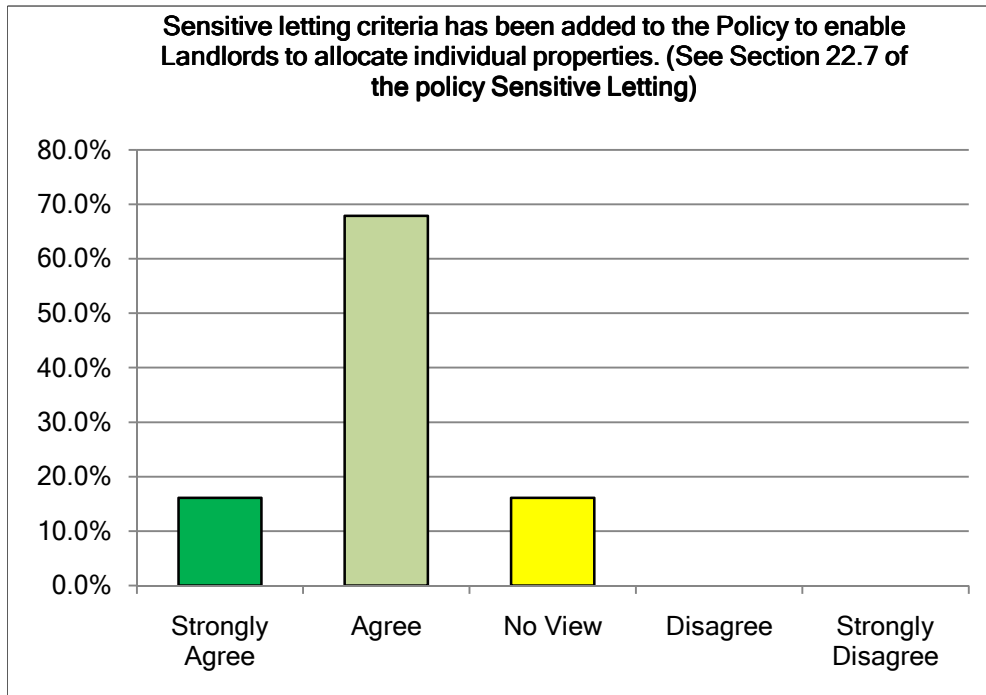
4.23 Q23 We are looking at ways in which we can enable the allocation of properties in very rural areas to applicants with a local connection to that area - please give us your views on the following statements:



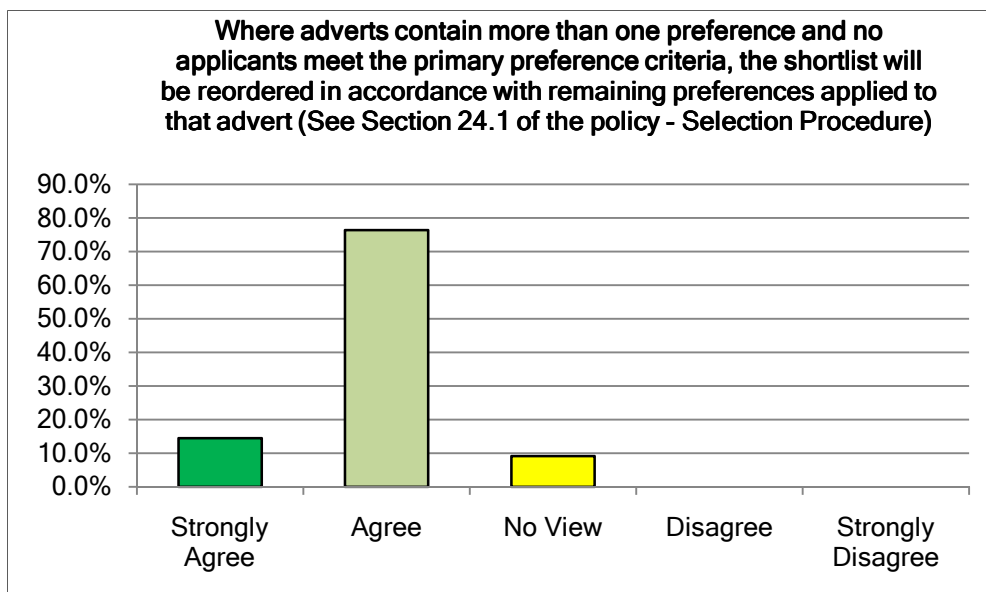
Update

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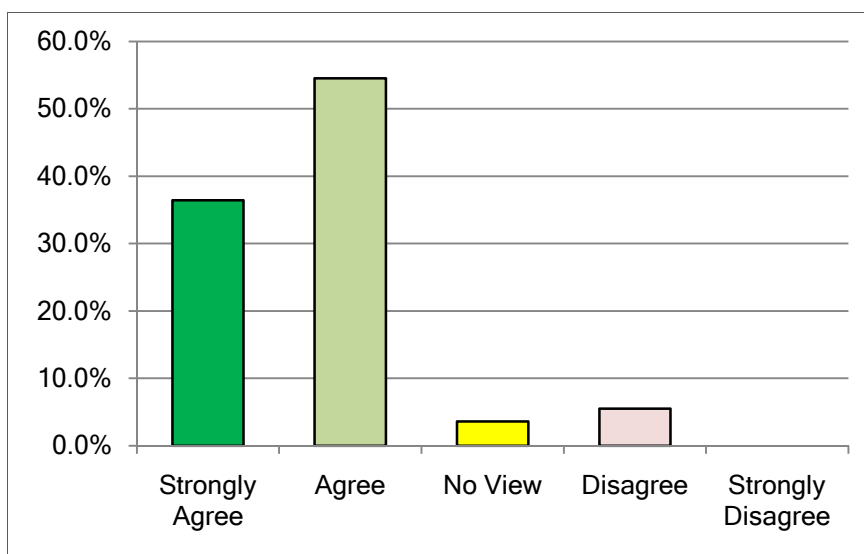
4.24 Q24 Sensitive letting criteria has been added to the Policy to enable Landlords to allocate individual properties. (See Section 22.7 of the policy Sensitive Letting)



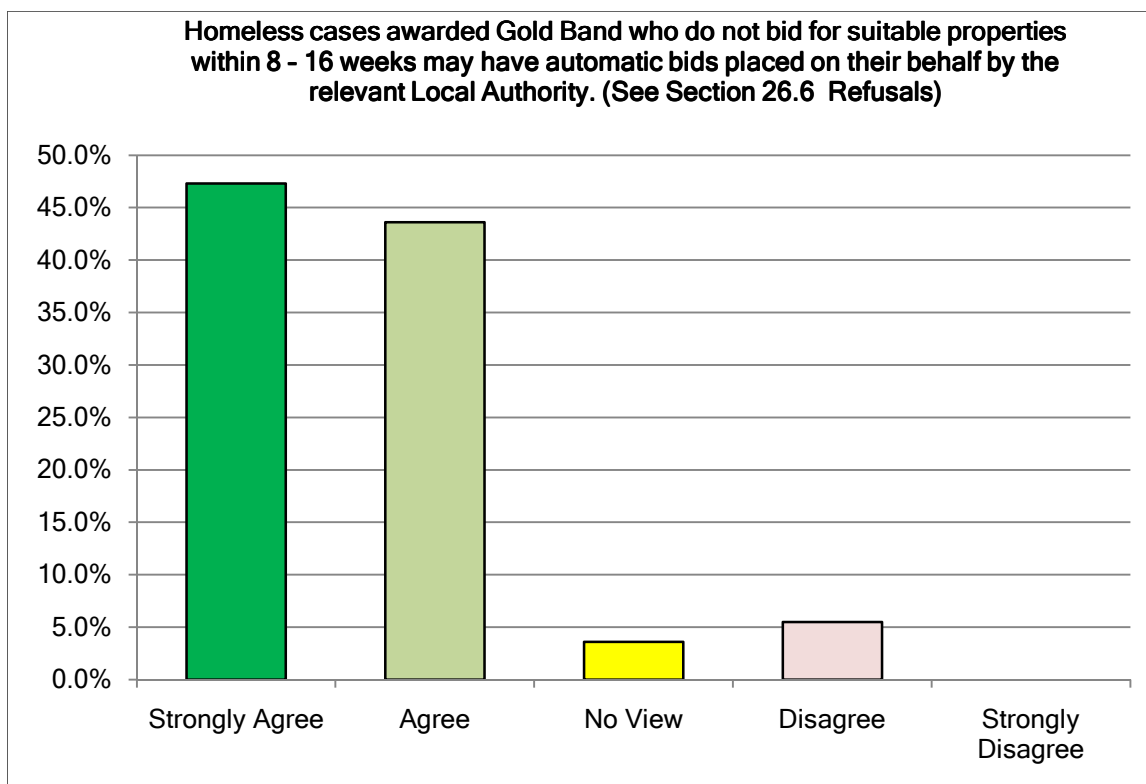
4.25 Q25 Where adverts contain more than one preference and no applicants meet the primary preference criteria, the shortlist will be reordered in accordance with remaining preferences applied to that advert (See Section 24.1 of the policy - Selection Procedure)



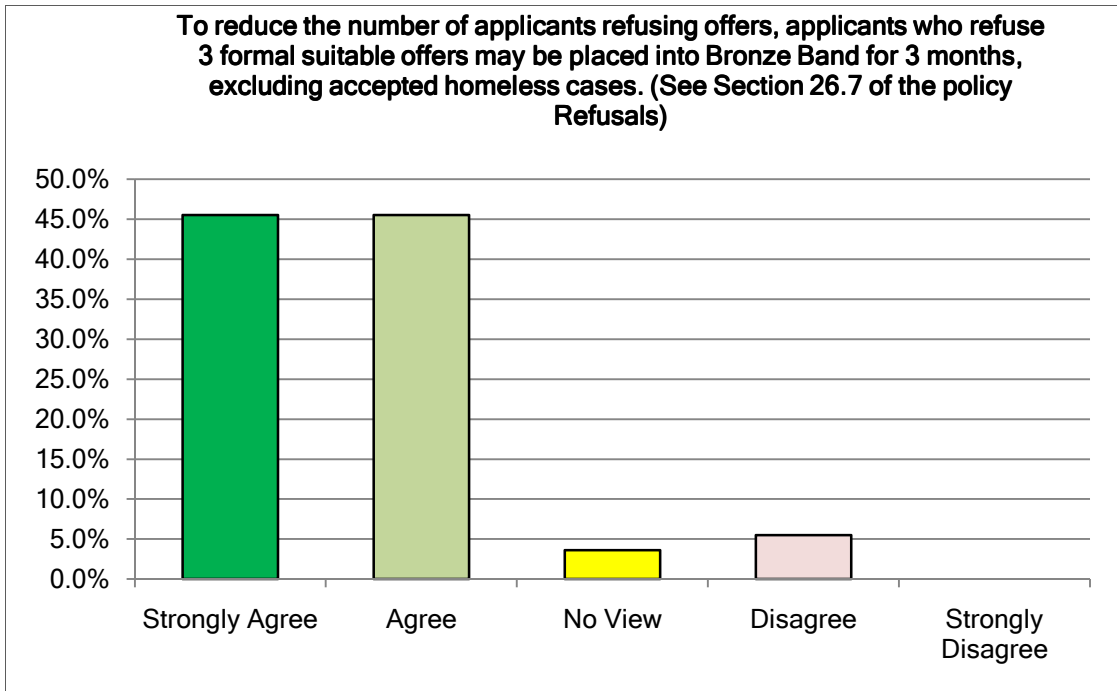
4.26 Q26 Applicants fleeing harassment will be monitored to identify patterns of bidding. If the applicant bids for a property in the same area they are fleeing harassment from the landlord may not offer the property. (See Section 24.5 of the policy - Selection Procedure)



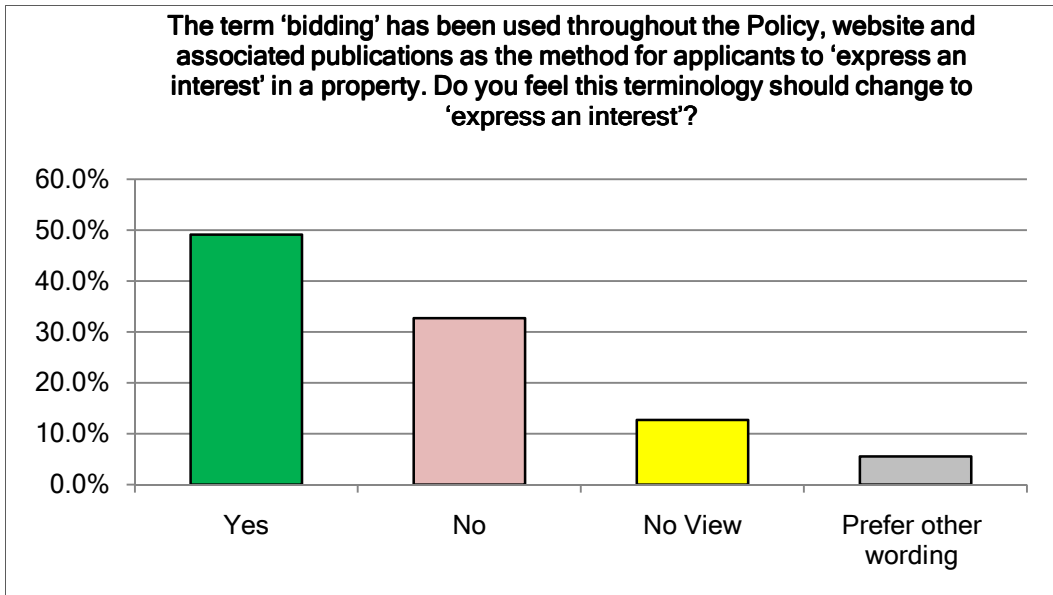
4.27 Q27 Homeless cases awarded Gold Band who do not bid for suitable properties within 8 – 16 weeks may have automatic bids placed on their behalf by the relevant Local Authority. (See Section 26.6 Refusals)



4.28 Q28 To reduce the number of applicants refusing offers, applicants who refuse 3 formal suitable offers may be placed into Bronze Band for 3 months, excluding accepted homeless cases. (See Section 26.7 of the policy Refusals)



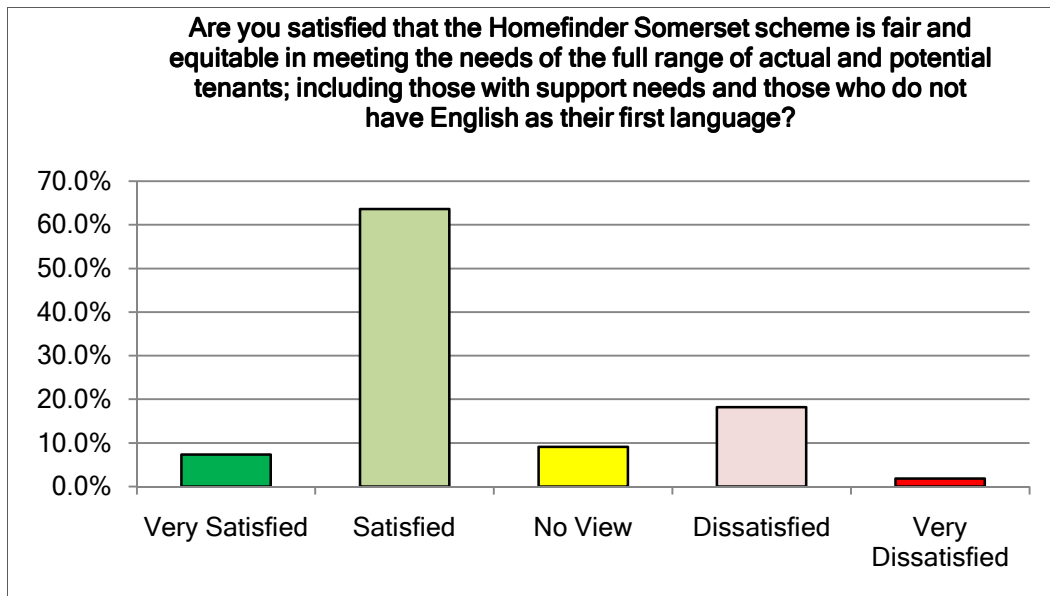
4.29 Q29 The term 'bidding' has been used throughout the Policy, website and associated publications as the method for applicants to 'express an interest' in a property. Do you feel this terminology should change to 'express an interest'?



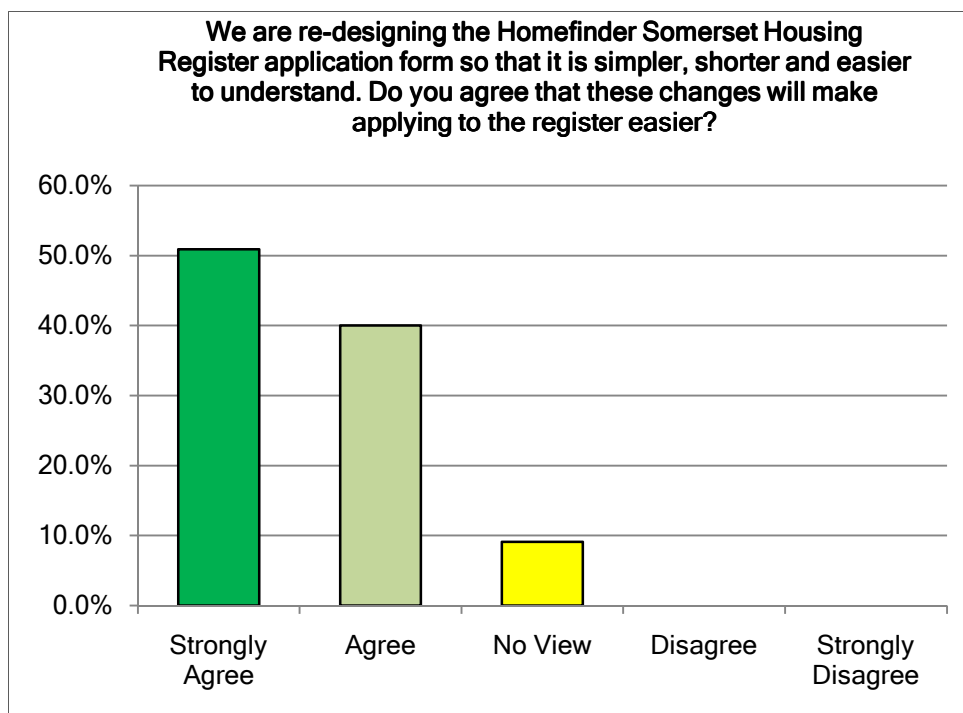
Update

The Review group discussed this question at their meeting on the 14th December 2010 and agreed that this change should go ahead based on the responses received.

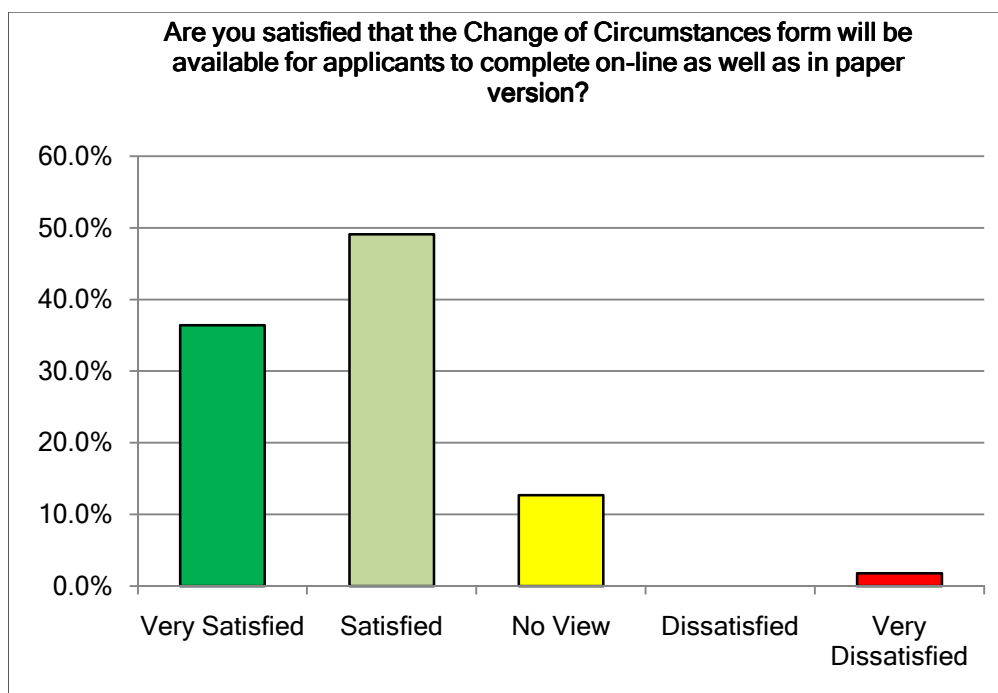
4.30 Q30 Are you satisfied that the Homefinder Somerset scheme is fair and equitable in meeting the needs of the full range of actual and potential tenants; including those with support needs and those who do not have English as their first language?



4.31 Q31 We are re-designing the Homefinder Somerset Housing Register application form so that it is simpler, shorter and easier to understand. Do you agree that these changes will make applying to the register easier?



4.32 Q32 Are you satisfied that the Change of Circumstances form will be available for applicants to complete on-line as well as in paper version?



AH
11.12.10
Updated 12.1.11



your home, your choice

homefindersomerset.co.uk

Homefinder Somerset Common Lettings Policy

Issue No 2: December 2010

How the Somerset Choice Based
Lettings Scheme Works

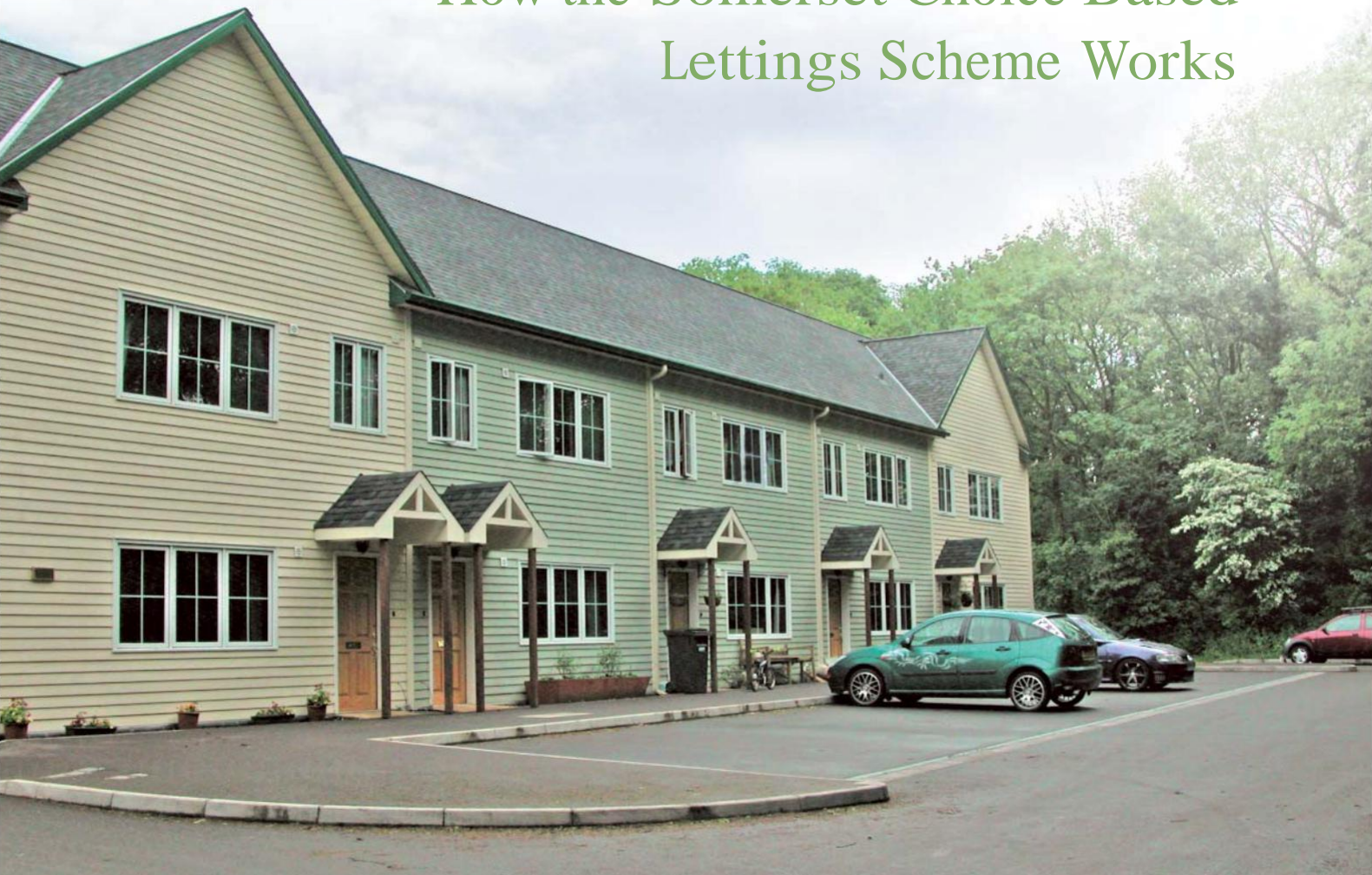




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Homefinder Somerset - Common Lettings & Assessment Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This document describes the Homefinder Somerset Choice Based Lettings Scheme (CBL) run by the five Somerset district councils in partnership with the majority of housing associations operating within Somerset.
- 1.2. The Government's policy objective is for choice based lettings schemes to develop on a sub- regional and/or regional basis. The Secretary of State believes that such schemes involving a partnership of housing authorities and registered providers of social housing working together with private landlords wherever possible is the best way to achieve the greatest choice and flexibility meeting applicant's needs.

The scheme's key objectives are:

- To deliver a customer-led choice based lettings system.
- To widen the choice of housing outside traditional local authority boundaries.
- To ensure the scheme is open, fair and accountable to applicants and staff.
- To increase understanding and satisfaction in the lettings system.
- To give new tenants a feeling of ownership of their property.
- To help create 'sustainable' communities.
- To make more efficient use of the available housing stock.
- To help tackle low demand.
- To reduce 'void' turnaround times.
- To reduce the number of refusals on 'hard to let' properties.
- To create a single point of access to all social housing in the County.
- To bring together a larger pool of available housing, giving applicants more choice and helping to ease localised problems of high demand.
- To enable greater regional mobility.
- To meet the legal requirements for the allocation of social housing as set out in the Housing Act (1996) as amended by the Homelessness Act (2002).

2. The Scheme in Brief

- 2.1. All applicants for social housing across Somerset will complete the same application form and will be assessed against the same clear set of criteria laid out in the 'Banding' structure (see section 6). Depending on their circumstances, applicants will be placed into one of four Bands, Gold, Silver, and Bronze or in a very small number of cases an Emergency Priority Band.
- 2.2. Once the application has been registered, applicants will be advised of their banding, application date, the size of property they are eligible for, together with a personal reference number which will enable them to express an interest for social housing vacancies being advertised across the whole of Somerset. Affordable housing including shared ownership and accredited private sector vacancies may also be advertised using this same process.



- 2.3. Expressions of interest for properties can be made, by using an automated phone line, the Homefinder Somerset website (via the Internet), or in person by visiting an office of one of the partner landlords. Applicants will be able to monitor the success of their expressions of interest and their history of expressions of interest via the website.
- 2.4. Once the deadline has passed for expressions of interest to be made, the successful applicant will usually be the person in the highest band with the earliest application date. An offer will then be made subject to the potential landlord confirming the details on the original application form and the current circumstances of the applicant. Incorrect information may result in the offer being withdrawn and the band being re-assessed.
- 2.5. Applicants for sheltered or supported housing will also have an assessment of their support needs. Applicants with identified support needs that express an interest for sheltered or supported housing vacancies will have priority over other applicants within the same band irrespective of whether those with no identified support needs have an earlier application date.
- 2.6. The banding and application date of the successful applicant, together with the total number of expressions of interest made for each property will be published. This enables applicants to develop realistic expectations regarding their chances of success and likely waiting period.

3. Application Procedure - Who Can Apply?

- 3.1. The Homefinder Somerset Register is open to almost any one. It may include existing tenants looking to transfer to another property, homeless families looking for a permanent home and other applicants who either rent in the private sector, own or are buying a property or lodging with family and friends. Married couples and civil partners will receive equal treatment under the policy.
- 3.2. An applicant may include anyone that may reasonably be expected to live with them as part of their application.
- 3.3. Where more than one eligible applicant wishes to have a shared application they will be known as joint applicants.
- 3.4. To apply for a property, applicants must be registered on the Homefinder Somerset Register.
- 3.5. Application packs are available from the offices of all the partners within the scheme and include details of how the scheme works and how to find and express an interest for a home.



3.6. Who Cannot Participate?

3.6.1. The Homefinder Somerset Register is open to all applicants except the following:

3.6.2. Persons from abroad who fail the 'habitual residence' test, UNLESS they have refugee status, exceptional leave to remain or indefinite leave to remain. Habitual Residency provides details about an applicant's right to stay in the UK and any eligibility for public housing.

3.6.3. There are certain regulations laid out by statute that govern the allocation of properties to persons from abroad and these should be referred to when assessing applications.

3.6.4. Persons under 16 years of age. It should be noted that a tenancy will not usually be given to applicants under the age of 18 years without a 'guarantor' (e.g. Social Services, parent, guardian, litigation friend). Partner organisations may have different policies in dealing with persons under the age of 18. For more details please contact the individual landlord.

3.7. What Other Factors Are Taken Into Account?

3.7.1. An application can be affected where there is evidence that an applicant has broken their existing or previous tenancy conditions (including rent arrears and anti-social behaviour) for which there are statutory grounds for possession, or who have committed acts of physical violence against staff or other residents. Grounds will not be used as a 'blanket ban' against all such people, but will be considered alongside each applicant's relative housing need. See Selection Procedure 24.3.

3.7.2. Where possible, such grounds will be identified at the initial application stage of the Homefinder Somerset process and the applicant will be informed in writing that any expression of interest for a property may be unsuccessful. All partners of Homefinder Somerset will also be notified of this decision. Applicants will be informed, on request, of decisions about the facts of the case that may affect whether to allocate housing.

3.7.3. Any applicant has the right for a review of the following decisions:

- a) That they are ineligible.
- b) That all priority will be suspended because of unacceptable behaviour.
- c) About the facts of their case: e.g. banding or eligibility for a property.

A Senior Housing Officer who has not been involved in the original decision will carry out such reviews.



4. Protocol for Housing Dangerous Offenders and Potentially Dangerous Offenders

- 4.1. All five District Councils within the scheme have entered into an agreement to use the Somerset Multi-Agency Protocol in dealing with dangerous offenders in order to exchange information on any applicant who has been convicted of a serious offence. Any applicant who confirms on their application form, or who is suspected, or accused, of being a dangerous offender, will be subjected to the provisions set out in the information exchange protocol.
- 4.2. There is not a blanket ban preventing dangerous offenders from being included on the housing register. However, before any known offender is offered housing, full consultation will be undertaken with the relevant support agencies to assess the risks involved. Some dangerous offenders will be given a high priority so that the relevant agencies can continue to monitor them. The Somerset Multi-Agency Protocol is only for specific offender group and only covers referrals from the Public Protection Team and Avon and Somerset Constabulary and does not guarantee the provision of a tenancy.
- 4.3. Re-housing of dangerous offenders will be carried out in consultation with the relevant agencies to minimise the risk to the public and with the long term aim of influencing the successful accommodation and resettlement of the offender, thus minimising the risk of re-offending and protecting the public and victims of offenders. The Local Authorities or Probation will express an interest on behalf of any applicant who falls within this category.
- 4.4. In the interests of public protection, it is essential that the Police and Probation Service are able to control and monitor the behaviour and activities of dangerous offenders. This task is made more difficult if such offenders do not have a fixed address or are housed in circumstances that make it difficult for the agencies to monitor them appropriately.

5. Transfer Policy

- 5.1. All existing tenants of the partners have the right to apply for a transfer, subject to any restrictions that apply to their tenancy. Tenants' housing needs will be assessed and placed in the relevant band on the register together with all other applicants.
- 5.2. Some advertised properties will be labelled giving preference to transfer applicants to ensure that each landlord makes the best use of their housing stock.



6. Assessment of Applications

- 6.1. The scheme will assess all applications according to the level of housing need of individual applicants. All applications will be placed into one of four Bands - Gold, Silver or Bronze or in exceptional circumstances placed into Emergency Priority Band (section 7 refers).

Applicants financial resources

- 6.2 Social Housing provided throughout Homefinder Somerset is for people who are considered to have insufficient resources to meet their housing need.
- 6.3 The resources available to each household will be assessed to determine whether they are sufficient to meet their housing need in accordance with this policy.

Household Income

- 6.4 Applicants with a gross household income more than four times higher than the relevant Local Housing Allowance level (or successor) prevailing in the relevant Somerset local authority area at the time will normally be considered to be able to meet their housing need, through either renting privately or owner occupation. Local affordability issues will be taken into account given that some areas of Somerset have especially high property values. Such applicants will therefore be placed in the Bronze housing need band unless the applicant falls within the circumstances set out at 6.8 below.
- 6.5 Further information on the financial assessment and the Local Housing Allowance rates that apply across Somerset are available from local authority housing teams.

The following types of income are fully disregarded:

- Attendance Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance

Capital, Savings and Equity

- 6.6 The capital, savings and equity available to an applicant's household will be assessed. If it is determined that, given:
- The applicant's capital, savings and equity;
 - The size and composition of the applicant's household;
 - The local housing market (for example prices to buy or rent privately);

that an applicant can resolve their own housing need within their local housing market, they will be placed in the bronze housing need band.

- 6.7 Applicants can contact their local authority housing teams for details of how this assessment is made.



-
- 6.8 An exemption from the financial assessment will apply if the applicant or their partner, where applicable, has been (or would be) accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need by a Homefinder Somerset local authority. Applicants who have an overriding medical or support need may be exempt from the financial assessment.
- 6.9 Partner landlords within Homefinder Somerset may have different policies relating to the levels of income and other assets of those households that they will accommodate. Whether an expression of interest for a home is accepted will therefore be subject to the policies of the each partner landlord. More information is available from each Homefinder Somerset partner.
- 6.10 Applicants may be required to demonstrate that they can afford the rent on any prospective tenancy before being allowed to sign for it.

Banding Criteria

- 6.11 Note that if an applicant accepts an offer of housing that does not fully meet their housing needs and then subsequently reapplies to the housing register with no change in their circumstances, it is likely that they will normally be placed in the bronze band.
- 6.12 The criteria for being placed within each band is as follows:

Gold Band

Homeless/Threatened with Homelessness:

Applicants accepted as homeless by a local authority within the Homefinder Somerset area under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) including Rent (Agricultural) Act Cases.

Lack of bedrooms / Overcrowding:

Applicants who lack 2 or more bedrooms, (Section 13 refers) or have been confirmed as overcrowded (defined as a category 1 hazard and/or Statutory overcrowded) by a Local Authority officer, UNLESS evidence exists that proves the overcrowding is deliberate. Where an applicant is sharing facilities please also see Silver band Lodger/Shared Accommodation.

Under-occupation:

The applicant is a tenant of a Homefinder Somerset partner who resides within the Homefinder Somerset area and under-occupies their existing property and is looking to move to a smaller, more suitable property. Note: Where a tenant lives in specialist two-bedroom property this may not apply. Applicants will only be able to benefit from this banding once when applying to the register unless there is a subsequent change in their circumstances.

Harassment:

The applicant is a victim of harassment or violence (including racial harassment) at their current property within the Homefinder Somerset area - providing evidence exists to substantiate the claim (e.g. from Police/Housing Officer).



Medical/Welfare:

The applicant is awarded a 'high' medical priority (see section 14).

Note that where public monies have been committed or works begun to adapt the applicants property to meet the applicants housing needs the applicant may be moved to bronze band.

Disrepair:

Based on the conditions identified, the local authority has deemed your home to have the presence of Category 1 hazards, Bands A - C (Housing Health & Safety Rating System) that CANNOT be resolved or reduced to a Category 2 hazard within 6 months.

Supported Housing:

The applicant resides within a short-term Supported Housing project (usually up to a maximum of two years) and is seeking to 'move-on' into independent accommodation. NB: The Project Manager of the scheme must confirm in writing that the applicant is ready for such a move and has acquired reasonable skills to sustain a tenancy. Until this time, the applicant will be placed within the Bronze Band. The application date will be the date they entered the Supported Housing, or the date a homeless application was made, where the earliest date will apply.

Care Leavers:

Where a young person who has been looked after, fostered or accommodated and has had a duty of care accepted under the Children Act in the Homefinder Somerset area, and is ready for independent living, they should be awarded gold band to enable a planned move on to independent suitable accommodation providing a support plan is in place.

Combined Medical/Welfare:

The applicant has been awarded a 'medium' medical priority, combined with a 'medium' disrepair award from the Silver Band (See Appendix 1&2).

Cumulative need

The applicant is awarded four or more silver band housing needs with the exception of those applicants that are found to be intentionally homeless by the relevant local authority.

Decants

Tenants whose existing properties are subject to major works for rebuilding/renovation or re-designation and need to move to another location, will be placed into the gold band to enable them to move quickly. Applicants will be placed into gold band up to 12 months before the proposed start date of the scheme/works (this date has to be confirmed by the landlord) and will be given an application date 1 year prior to their actual registration date.

Tenancy Succession

Where the Local Authority receives written support from a Homefinder Somerset landlord that an applicant has been living in a social housing property but has no legal right to succession on that property, and the landlord confirms that they intend to pursue possession of the property, the applicant may be placed into gold band. The applicant will be subject to the financial assessment set out within the policy.



Silver Band

Medical/Welfare:

Applicant awarded a 'medium' medical priority (see section 14).

Disrepair:

Based on the conditions identified by the local authority, it has been shown that your home has Category 1 hazards, Bands A - C (Housing Health & Safety Rating System) that CAN be resolved or reduced to a Category 2 hazard within 6 months and/or has shown that your home has Category 2 hazards, Band D (Housing Health & Safety Rating System).or at least 4 Category 2 Hazards.

Lodgers/Shared Facilities:

Applicant lodging with friends or family or in accommodation with shared living facilities. This will take precedence over any lack of bedroom requirements.

Lack of bedrooms:

Applicants who lack one bedroom in their current home.

Other Homeless:

Homeless/threatened with homelessness applicants not accepted by the Homefinder Somerset partners under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 and who have nowhere to live (e.g. No Fixed Abode 'NFA').

Split Families:

Applicants who, not by choice are living in separate households due to the lack of suitable accommodation available, and cannot live together and wish to be re-housed and have not been accepted by the Homefinder Somerset Partners under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002). This includes those who may not have been living as part of the household at the time of the application, but whom it would be reasonable to expect to live with the applicant, as part of his/her household.

An application form should be completed by the household living in the worst property out of the households applying, to ensure the application is placed in the correct banding.

Work/Support

Applicants who are able to demonstrate the need to move nearer their place of work within, the Homefinder Somerset area because they have secured or has permanent employment (over 16 hours) in the area (evidence of the employment must be provided). Also applicants who are able to demonstrate the need to move nearer local facilities or relatives, in order to receive, or give, support or care within the Homefinder Somerset area.

Relationship Breakdown:

Applicants who wish to live independently but who still reside with their ex partner/spouse following a relationship breakdown.



Children in flats:

Applicant who is pregnant or has a child/children under 10 years of age and lives in a first floor flat or above. Proof of pregnancy must be provided.

Bronze Band 

Adequately Housed:

Applicants who, at the time of their application, live in a property which is adequate for their needs in terms of size and facilities. This applies to applicants who live in social housing, are owner-occupiers or tenants of private landlords. Note an applicant that lives in a self contained bedsit/studio flat or apartment where no facilities are shared will be banded in bronze unless they have other housing needs.

Owner occupiers:

Applicants who are owner-occupiers (this includes shared equity properties), whose home is not suitable for their needs and who have sufficient equity within the property to obtain suitable alternative accommodation. The Local Authority will consider each application on an individual basis. (Note: high medical needs or disrepair problems may over-ride this rule and place the applicant in a higher band).

Medical/ welfare:

Applicants awarded a low medical/welfare assessment. (See Section 14)

Disrepair:

No significant hazards identified justifying enforcement action by the local authority. (See Appendix 1).

Move-on:

Applicants who are living in short term supported housing or are care leavers, prior to confirmation received by the Project Manager of the scheme or relevant care leavers protocol arrangements that the applicant is ready to move on, (at which point they will be placed into the Gold Band whilst maintaining their original application date).



7. Emergency Priority Band

7.1. An 'Emergency Priority Band' will only be issued to any applicant who requires an 'urgent' move to ensure the applicant's safety and welfare for whatever reason. Substantial evidence must exist before such a priority is awarded. This priority may be awarded where circumstances could include:

- a) The award of an 'urgent' medical assessment as defined in appendix 2 or
- b) The award of an 'urgent' disrepair inspection by a Housing Standard Officer or Environmental Health Officer (EHO), or
- c) In extreme cases where the Police or other relevant agency recommend an urgent move to escape violence or threats of violence, or
- d) Where the applicant, or a member of their household, has suffered a sudden 'traumatic event' and living within their home will cause considerable distress (e.g. serious sexual assault), or
- e) Where there are extreme cases of cumulative need and where it is unacceptable for the applicant to remain in the current banding (subject to the discretion of the Assessment Panel).

7.2. Please note that awarding of 'Emergency Priority Band' can only be made by the Assessment Panel except where confirmation has been received from a hospital that an applicant is bed blocking and they are unable return to their home due to its unsuitability. Where an immediate decision is required, the Senior Manager within the respective local authority administering the housing register will consult two other members of the Assessment Panel, one of which must be from another partner organisation in order for a decision to be made. The case, and subsequent decision, must be reported to the next Assessment Panel meeting.

7.3. Emergency Priority Band may also be awarded where the tenant of a 'sheltered' or 'adapted' property for the disabled has died leaving another family member in the property and the landlord wishes that family member to be moved quickly to enable the property to be let to an applicant who requires it.

7.4. Emergency Priority Band is time limited and will last for 28 calendar days. If the applicant has not applied for a property suitable for their needs within that time their Emergency Priority Band will be reviewed by the Assessment Panel and if not renewed the applicant will be placed in the appropriate band for their needs. If no suitable vacancy has arisen within this time then the Emergency Priority Band will be renewed automatically.



8. Application Date

8.1. All applications will be given an 'Application Date'. This will be used when allocating properties to determine how long an applicant has been entered on the Homefinder Somerset Register. The date used for the application date will depend on the type of application. These are:

a) Applicants in short term supported housing

Any applicant living in short-term supported housing will have an application date of the day they moved into the scheme. Verification of this will need to be provided by the Project Manager of the scheme.

b) Homeless applicants accepted under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002)

The date the applicant made their formal homeless application to the local authority.

Note: If the homeless applicant was already placed in the 'Gold' Band as a result of some other need, then their date of application remains the same and does not change to the date they made their homeless application.

c) General Applicants

Date the Homefinder Somerset Register application was received for assessment.

d) Emergency Priority Band Holders

Length of time 'Emergency' Priority Band held.

9. Change of Circumstances

9.1. Applicants whose circumstances change once they have applied for housing must either complete a 'Change of Circumstances' form (online or manual) or write to the local council housing office to enable their application to be reassessed by a housing officer. A change of circumstances could include the birth of a child, change in medical condition, threat of homelessness or change of address. The applicant must advise whether or not the landlord has carried out the improvements to remove hazards previously identified.

9.2. If an applicant moves into a higher band as a result of the reassessment then their original 'Application Date' will change to the date their circumstances changed. If the applicant moves into a lower band then their original 'Application Date' will remain the same.

9.3. In circumstances where registered 'Joint' applicants subsequently separate, the Homefinder Somerset scheme reserves the right to apply the original registration date to the household affected.



10. Application Renewals

10.1. Annual Renewal

Within 12 months from their initial registration date, all applicants may be sent a renewal letter. If the renewal information is not returned within 28 calendar days a cancellation letter will be sent.

If the applicant has been identified as potentially disadvantaged, including prison leavers, a letter will also be sent to the carer/agency specified. Failure to respond may result in a cancellation of application. Applications that are cancelled are subject to the review process.

10.2. No Expression of Interest Renewals

Where an applicant has not expressed an interest in any available properties for one year, from their date of application, they will be contacted to see if they still wish to remain on the Homefinder Somerset Register. If there is no response within the required time limit of 28 calendar days from the letter being sent, the application may be cancelled. The applicant will be notified of the cancellation in writing. If the applicant contacts the Local Authority within 28 calendar days of their application being cancelled and indicates that they still wish to be considered for housing the application will be reinstated from their last application date in band.

11. Cancelling Applications

11.1. An application will be cancelled from the Homefinder Somerset Register in the following circumstances:

- At the request of an applicant,
- Where an applicant does not respond to an application review, within the specified time limit,
- Where a Local Authority or a Registered Social Landlord has housed the applicant,
- When a tenant completes a mutual exchange,
- Where an applicant does not maintain their application through the review process, or where the applicant moves and does not provide a contact address,
- Where the applicant has not supplied the relevant information requested within 28 calendar days.
- Where an applicant is housed.

11.2. When an application has been cancelled (except where an applicant is housed by a Homefinder Somerset partner landlord), the applicant or their representative will be notified in writing. Where an applicant has been highlighted as potentially disadvantaged, the Local Authority will contact the applicant to check their circumstances before cancelling the application.

11.3. Any applicant whose application has been cancelled has the right to ask for a review of the decision.



12. Rejoining the Homefinder Somerset Housing Register

12.1. Where an applicant wishes to re-join the housing register at a later date their new date of registration will be the date they re-apply. Their date in band will be the date that they are placed in the housing needs band following assessment of the new application.

13. Size of Property

13.1. Applicants will be able to express an interest for selected properties which match the needs of their household. Household members living together as a couple will be assessed as requiring 1 bedroom unless there are exceptional circumstances. Additional adults (defined as being 16 years of age or older) living permanently in a household will require an extra bedroom but may share if of the same gender.

A maximum of two people can share a bedroom. Children who are over 7 and of different genders will require their own room.

As a general point an applicant's minimum bedroom requirement will be based on household members that are over 7 years old and under 16 years of age that are of the same sex sharing a bedroom, with household members over 7 years old and under 16 years of age of different sexes requiring their own rooms. The maximum entitlement will be based on all household members over 7 years of age requiring their own room.

When letting houses, priority will normally be given to households with children under 16.

Please note individual landlord letting policies or local planning policies may affect size of households that may apply for particular properties. Any such restrictions will be included in the property advert.

The property sizes shown below do not necessarily apply to existing tenants who are under occupying their existing property and are seeking to move to a property that is at least 1 bedroom smaller.

Please Note - Applicants banding (for the purposes of lacking bedrooms) will be based on their minimum bedroom entitlement.



Size of Property

Household Composition	Assessed Property Size & Type – used for banding	
	Min Bedroom	Max Bedroom
Single applicant or couple with 2 children same sex (both 16 or over)	2	3
Single applicant or couple with 2 children same or mixed sex (both under 7)	2	2
Single applicant or couple with 2 children mixed sex both over 7 and under 16	3	3
Single applicant or couple with 2 children same sex both over 7 and under 16	2	2
Single applicant or couple with 2 children mixed sexes (both 16 or over)	3	3
Single applicant or couple with 3 children (mixed sexes, one male under 16 and two mixed aged 16 or over	4	4
Single applicant or couple with 3 children (mixed sexes, one male under 16 and two female aged 16 or over)	3	4
Single applicant or couple with 3 children (mixed sexes, two male under 16 and one female aged 16 or over.	3	4
Single applicant or couple with 3 children (2 mixed under 16 (older than 7) and 1 male aged 16 or over.	4	4
Single applicant or couple with 3 children (mixed sexes, two mixed under 7 and one male aged 16 or over.	3	4
Single applicant or couple with 4 children (2 mixed sexes under 7, two mixed under aged 16.	4	4
Single applicant or couple with 4 children (2 same sexes under 7, two same sex under aged 16.	3	4
Single applicant or couple with 4 children (2 same sexes under 16, two same sex over 16.	3	4
Single applicant or couple with 4 children (3 same mixed under 16 2 Male 1 female, 1 male over 16.	4	4
Single applicant or couple with 5 children (3 same mixed under 16 2 Male 1 female, 2 mixed over 16.	5	6



- 13.2. Because of the very high demand for properties within Somerset, additional bedrooms cannot be given to applicants who do not have children who normally live permanently with them as their full time principle home. Partner landlords may choose to allow applicants to express an interest for properties that are larger than their needs but this will be on a property by property basis and is at the landlords discretion.
- 13.3. For any current tenant of a partner landlord downsizing to smaller accommodation there are no restrictions on the size of property they can move to providing no overcrowding will occur. The new property has to have at least one bedroom less than their current home. However in certain circumstances, where an applicant for example is moving from a house to a flat with the same number of bedrooms, then the number of bedrooms maybe disregarded.
- 13.4. Where tenants of a partner landlord are overcrowded within their accommodation account should be taken of the room sizes in determining an applicants banding. For example, where a tenant is living in 2 bedroom, 3 bed space unit, if there is a couple and 2 children living within the property, these applicants should be viewed as one bedroom overcrowded, Silver Band, eligible to apply for a 3 bedroom property, as they are one bed space overcrowded.
- 13.5. Applicants who are overcrowded by 2 bedroom spaces or more should be 'Gold Banded'. See section 6.1 – gold band for further information. Consideration for an extra bedroom will also be given where the applicant has a live-in carer.
14. Medical Assessments
- 14.1. An applicant's (or member of the household included within the application) medical condition can be assessed in one of two ways:
- Physical condition/illness:
Applicants complete a Health & Housing Assessment Form, which asks for details of the applicant's medical condition, reasons why their current property affects that condition and reasons why they wish to move.
- Mental Health
The Health & Housing Assessment Form also assesses an applicant's mental health condition. Applicants may wish this form to be supported by a professional worker (e.g. CPN, Social Services, Doctor) who has knowledge of the applicant and their condition.
- 14.2. All medical applications will initially be assessed by an appropriate Housing Officer or by Assessment Panels.
- 14.3. The assessment will be based on the applicant's (or member of the household included in the application) medical condition, the affect their property has on that condition and how moving to an alternative property can help that condition. (See Appendix 2 for Medical Assessment Notes)



14.4. Following the medical assessment, the applicant will be informed in writing of the outcome and any change to their banding. If the applicant disagrees with this assessment they may appeal to the panel to reconsider their medical application. The Panel will only undertake reviews where further medical evidence is supplied by the applicant to substantiate their application. Any requests for a review of the Panel's decision must be made within 14 days and the decision will be reviewed within 28 calendar days.

14.5. Where an applicant's (or member of the household included in the application) medical circumstances change substantially, a new medical application should be submitted along with any supporting evidence.

15. Disrepair Assessments

15.1. The application form asks applicants about the condition of their current home. Where an applicant indicates the property is in a bad state of repair they will be sent a 'Property Condition Report Form' to complete and return to their local authority housing office. The form asks the applicant for details of the hazards that are affecting their health or safety and these will be used by an appropriate Housing Officer or referred to an inspector (normally an Environmental Health Officer (EHO) or Housing Standards Officer) when conducting an inspection of the property. If the applicant resides outside of the Homefinder Somerset area, then the Homefinder Somerset Partnership will contact the respective Local Authority to arrange an inspection, if required.

15.2. Following the inspection, and depending on the condition of the property, a level of priority will be allocated - either nil, low, medium, high or urgent, which will determine the band in which the applicant is placed. If the applicant is an existing social housing tenant the relevant landlord will be notified of the problem.

16. Notification

16.1. Once you have been verified as eligible to join the register, your fully completed application form will then be assessed. We aim to undertake this assessment within 15 working days. You will then receive a letter confirming your application details. This letter will notify you of the following ;

- a) The Band in which the applicant has been placed (bronze, silver or gold or emergency)
- b) The reason for their banding
- c) The size of property the applicant is eligible for,
- d) The Application Date,
- e) A reminder about informing us of any change in circumstances,
- f) The Homefinder Somerset review procedure (see section 17),
- g) A personal reference number to allow expressions of interest for properties.



16.2. Applicants will also receive notification of their application details within 15 working days if they have submitted a Change of Circumstances' form.

17. Review Procedure

17.1. Once an applicant has been notified in writing of the band in which they have been placed or their ineligibility, they will have a right to request a review against the assessment. Reviews must be submitted in writing, to the local authority housing office within 21 calendar days of the date on the notification letter and include the reason why the applicant believes their banding or ineligibility is wrong, together with any additional information that the applicant believes is relevant.

17.2. The request for a review will be acknowledged by the Local Authority within 5 working days of its receipt. An officer who played no part in the original assessment will carry out the review and respond in writing to the applicant within 28 calendar days of the receipt of the review letter. Following the review, the applicant will be informed of the outcome in writing.

17.3. If the applicant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the review then they can request a further review through the relevant local authorities reviews procedure.

18. Finding a Home

18.1. Once applicants have been entered on the Homefinder Somerset Register and notified of banding and reference number, they can start to look for a property of their choice.

19. Advertising

19.1. All partner landlords are committed to advertising their available properties as widely as possible. Properties can be advertised on a weekly/fortnightly basis and may be advertised in one or more of the following ways:

a) Newsletters

Adverts may also be placed into free Homefinder Somerset newsletters, which will be available in a number of localities across Somerset.

b) Website

A dedicated Homefinder Somerset website is available (www.homefindersomerset.co.uk) and is accessible to anyone with Internet access. The website will allow applicants to view all available properties across the whole of Somerset and apply 'on-line' for properties of their choice.



c) Local Offices

Computers will be placed in some landlords' offices for applicants to view and express an interest for available properties. Other sites may also be considered.

d) Hotline

A local number is available for applicants to call to hear what properties are available.

Applicants will hear an options menu where different size properties can be selected and heard. This service is important to the Homefinder Somerset service and our efforts to assist disabled applicants, particularly those who are blind or partially sighted to access the service.

The Hotline service will also benefit those applicants who are unable to read.

20. Advertisement Deadlines

20.1. All advertisements will carry a deadline by which time expressions of interest for particular properties must be received. This will normally be one week from the date of the advert. Any applications received after the deadline has been reached will not be considered for the property.

21. Property Descriptions

21.1. Properties advertised will carry (where possible) a photograph of the property and a full description. As a minimum the description will include:

- a) Type of property
- b) Number of bedrooms
- c) Location of property
- d) Any adaptations (e.g. disabled facilities)
- e) Services provided (e.g. support, caretaker, cleaning)
- f) Heating type
- g) Rent charged/service charges

22. Labelling Properties

22.1. Adverts will also give information on who will be eligible to apply for the property. For example, if the property is a sheltered housing unit the advert may state that only applicants above a certain age with support needs would be eligible or where there are other support needs due to physical or mental disabilities. An adapted property suitable for someone in a wheelchair may be labelled to say that applicants must require such a property.

22.2. Properties will only be available to applicants in certain 'Bands' according to the size and type of the property, the number of annual vacancies and level of demand. For example, a three-bedroom property in a high demand area may only be advertised to 'Gold' Band applicants, areas where there is low demand may be offered to both Gold and Silver Band applicants, or in some cases, all bands. In addition certain properties may only be available to applicants that meet specific eligibility criteria (e.g. eligible for supported housing, or having certain age requirements for household members).



22.3. Supported Accommodation (e.g. sheltered)

In addition to the banding system, all partner landlords may wish to ensure that supported accommodation is allocated to those who have not only a housing need but also a 'support' need (as detailed in the application form). Landlords will therefore be looking to accept expressions of interest from applicants in the highest band and who may have an identifiable support need in addition to the earliest application date. This support need will be verified at the time of the home visit.

22.4. Local Connection

Although the banding system reflects housing need and subsequently the priority of each application, there may be occasions when it may be appropriate to protect housing for local people. Local connection is defined where an applicant has:

- Normally be resident in Homefinder Somerset. Local Government Association guidelines define this as having resided in the relevant area for six of the last twelve months, or three out of the last five years, where residence has been out of choice. In line with the Housing and Regeneration Act (2008) service personnel who have been based and living in Somerset will be considered to have a local connection with Somerset.
- Work in Homefinder Somerset. The Local Government Association guidelines define this as employment other than of a casual nature. For the purposes of this policy this will be defined as having had permanent work with a minimum of a 16 hour contract per week for the previous 6 months, and without a break in the period of employment for more than three months.
- Note that residency in a property where treatment or rehabilitation of any kind whilst working will not count towards establishing a local connection.
- Where an applicant needs to move to take up an offer of permanent employment (over 16 hours and evidence will be required) within Homefinder Somerset and commuting to their new place of work from their existing home would be unreasonable.
- Have family connections in Homefinder Somerset. The Local Government Association guidelines define this as immediate family members (parents, siblings and non-dependent children) who have themselves lived in the area for five years and with whom there has been frequent contact, commitment or dependency.
- Demonstrate a need to move to Homefinder Somerset to give or receive medical or other support.



Preference may be given to local residents who may be economically or socially driven from their community due to a lack of affordable housing. This may be due to planning restrictions (Section 106 Agreements) or to ensure sustainability of the parish where there is a clearly proven local housing need.

22.5. Transfer Applications

All the partner landlords are keen to ensure that they make the best use of their own stock. To achieve this, it is likely that a certain proportion of properties advertised will be labelled giving preference to transfer applicants or transfer applicants in a specific band, for example the silver band and in some cases preference will also be given to existing tenants of that landlord. The number of properties labelled as such will be monitored on a regular basis.

22.6. Accepted Duty Homeless Cases

In order to fulfil its statutory duties towards the homeless and to create a through flow of temporary accommodation a Local Authority may label properties allowing only households who have been accepted by that Authority as unintentionally homeless and in priority need, to express a preference or give preference to this group.

22.7 Sensitive Letting – individual properties

Occasionally there may be a requirement to assist in dealing with issues that impact on a small, specific location that may be only 1 dwelling on an estate or within a block. This may be to:

- Reduce the concentration of certain needs groups which are impacting on housing management
- Promote a mixed and sustainable community by seeking to select/not select households with particular characteristics

On these occasions certain property labels (e.g. minimum age of household members) may be used following a discussion between the local authority and the relevant landlord (where the local authority is not the landlord itself). The decision to apply particular requirements will be made by the relevant Homefinder Somerset local authority.

22.8. Labelling Caution

The general effect of labelling can be seen to compromise the extent to which vacancies will be let to the highest priority applicant as described under the banding system. It is therefore important for each landlord to minimise such labelling in order to maintain transparency to the allocation system.



22.9. Complaints

Any complaints about the applicant's banding should be directed to the Local Authority. Complaints regarding the labelling of the property e.g. size, amenities, should be referred to the individual landlord of the property. If a successful applicant is not offered the accommodation for any reason then any complaints regarding this should be directed to the landlord making this decision.

23. Expressing an interest in a Property

23.1. Where an applicant meets the eligibility criteria, and is placed within the stated band or bands given in the advert, they may express an interest for that property within the deadline given.

23.2. Applicants are limited to three expressions of interest per weekly cycle, however, this will be monitored by the Homefinder Somerset Scheme on each weekly advert. Where an applicant expresses an interest for a property successfully, they will be given a time period (normally 48 hours) in which to decide which property they will accept.

23.3. Applicants may apply for properties via www.homefindersomerset.co.uk or by contacting their respective local authority housing office;

a) Mendip District Council, Cannards Grave Rd, Shepton Mallet
BA4 5BT
Tel: 01749 648999 web:- www.mendip.gov.uk

b) Sedgemoor District Council
Bridgwater House, King Square, Bridgwater, Somerset
TA6 3AR
Tel: 0845 4082540 web:- www.sedgemoor.gov.uk

c) South Somerset District Council
Housing Advice Centre, Petters House,
Petters Way, Yeovil, Somerset
BA20 1EA
Tel: 01935 462462 web:- www.southsomerset.gov.uk

d) Taunton Deane Borough Council
The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton,
Somerset, TA1 1HE
Tel: 01823 356356 web:- www.tauntondeane.gov.uk



e) West Somerset Council
West Somerset House,
Killick Way,
Williton
TA4 4QA

And:

1 Summerland Road, Minehead
TA24 5BP

Tel 01643 703704

web:- www.westsomersetonline.gov.uk

24. Selection Procedure

- 24.1. Once the advert deadline has passed, each district will run a report from the computer system, which will list all the advertised properties and all the applicants who have applied for each of them. For each property advertised the successful applicant will be the applicant(s) who has been entered on the housing register for the longest period of time and has been placed in the highest band. The length of time on the housing register is indicated by using the individual 'Application Dates' given to each applicant. The application date will be determined depending on the type of application, as described in section 8 'Application Date'. In the situation where there are two households with the same circumstances, and same waiting time, the landlord will visit both households to assess who is in the greatest housing need and will take into account cumulative preferences. Where an advert has been placed with more than one preference and no applicants meet all the preference criteria, the shortlist will be ordered in accordance with the remaining preferences set for that property. Details of successful applicants will be checked to ensure they are eligible for the property. Only those applicants who meet the stated criteria will be offered the property.
- 24.2. The name of the successful applicant will be forwarded to the agreed officer within each landlords' organisation (some landlords will be able to access directly the computer system expressions of interest for their respective properties). Each individual landlord is responsible for the verification of the successful applicant. Each applicant will be given the opportunity to view the property before making a final decision on whether to accept or refuse. Assistance with viewing will be available if required.
- 24.3. If an applicant has been identified as being unsuitable to be a tenant due to the grounds described in section 3.7, and has made no attempt to rectify the situation then the applicant may not be allocated the property despite a successful expression of interest. The applicant can make an application if they consider that they should no longer be treated as ineligible for an allocation of social housing, e.g. because the rent arrears have been cleared or an agreement has been reached and maintained over a reasonable period of time or because the person who had been guilty of anti-social behaviour is no longer part of their household.



- 24.4. If a property is subsequently withdrawn after an applicant has successfully expressed an interest, because for example the tenant of that particular property has failed to vacate the property or the property has been incorrectly labelled, the landlord will inform the successful applicant that the property is no longer available. If the property is not ready for occupation following a successful expression of interest and the applicant is likely to wait some considerable time before moving in, the landlord will inform the applicant and give them the option to express an interest for any other suitable properties.
- 24.5 If an applicant is banded in the Gold band due to harassment in a specific area and expresses an interest on a property in that same general area. The landlord or local authority may choose not to offer that property to the applicant (if they are the highest applicant on the shortlist) if in their opinion, it is unlikely to address the harassment issues raised on the initial application.
- 24.6 When offering properties landlords should have regard to the housing needs of the applicant as per their banding reason.
25. Feedback
- 25.1. An important part of the scheme is giving applicants feedback on who has recently been allocated properties. Accompanying each advert will be a feedback section giving details of the properties allocated.
- 25.2. Applicant's personal details will not be included. However, it is envisaged that the feedback form will include:
- a) Property size and type
 - b) Property location
 - c) Number of applicants who applied for each property
 - d) Band of successful applicant
 - e) Application date of successful applicant
- 25.3. An overview of this information will be regularly monitored.
- 25.4. Using this information, applicants will be able to see where properties are more likely to become available and where they may have the best chances of making a successful 'expression of interest'. It is essential that with any choice-based lettings scheme, applicants have as much information as possible in order to help them make an informed evaluation of their housing options.



26. Refusals

- 26.1. If an applicant decides to refuse an offer of accommodation, either at the accompanied viewing, or when an initial verbal offer is made, the property will be offered to the next eligible persons.
- 26.2. If a homeless applicant refuses an offer of suitable accommodation, the Local Authority may decide to discharge its duty under the Homeless Legislation.
- 26.3. Homeless applicants have the right to request a review of certain decisions made by the local authority in respect of their homeless application. Within the Homefinder Somerset Common Lettings Policy this includes the decision to discharge the main homeless duty to secure accommodation by providing suitable accommodation for the applicant.
- 26.4. If a homeless applicant wishes to request a review of the suitability of accommodation offered, this should be requested before the end of the period of 21 calendar days beginning with the day on which they are notified of the housing authority's decision to discharge its main homeless duty.
- 26.5. A homeless applicant who is requesting a review about the suitability of accommodation will be advised to accept and move into the accommodation pending the outcome of their review request. The Local Authority's Homeless Section will inform the appropriate officer as soon as a decision has been made, normally within 7 calendar days as to whether or not the property will remain available through the review process. It should be noted the property will only be held open in exceptional circumstances. If a non statutory review is conducted and the offer withdrawn by the Homeless Officer on grounds of suitability then the second placed applicant will be made an offer of the property. If the outcome of a review is overturned in favour of the homeless applicant, the alternative accommodation will be provided as quickly as possible. However if the review of suitability of the offer is upheld the applicant will still have accommodation to live in whilst they consider their further options.
- 26.6. Households who have been placed in the gold band because they are homeless or threatened with homelessness will be expected to express an interest for all suitable homes within the relevant local authorities area advertised through Homefinder Somerset each week. This will be monitored on a regular basis by the relevant local authority. If after a period of between 8 to 16 weeks applicants are not actively expressing an interest for suitable accommodation then automatic expressions of interest may be placed on their behalf. Before automatic expressions of interest are placed the relevant local authority will carry out an assessment as to what type of property would be suitable and in what location. Automatic expressions of interests will be limited to the local authority area where the applicant has been accepted as homeless unless the applicant has expressed a preference to move to another Homefinder Somerset local authority area. If the homeless applicant refuses a suitable offer of accommodation within the Homefinder Somerset area, the Local Authority will consider its duty towards them as a homeless household discharged, subject of course to the statutory review process.
- 26.7. Records will be maintained on the number of refusals for each property and the reason why the applicant decided to refuse. With the exception of applicants who are in gold band because they are homeless or threatened with homelessness, applicants who refuse three



formal offers for suitable accommodation will have their case reviewed by the local authority managing their case. They will be offered advice and assistance regarding the Homefinder Somerset scheme. If they subsequently refuse one further offer they will be placed in bronze band for 3 months. After 3 months the applicant will be reassessed and placed in the appropriate band and may lose their original effective date.

27. Difficult to Let

27.1. If a vacancy cannot be filled via the CBL scheme, the property can be re-advertised on a wider basis in conjunction with the Local Authority.

28. Excluded Properties

28.1. All the partner landlords are committed to advertising as many of their vacant properties as possible through the CBL system. There will be occasions when certain properties will not be advertised and the reasons for these exclusions will be monitored. An example would be extra care vacancies which are allocated jointly with Somerset County's Community Directorate (Social Services).

29. False Information and Deliberately Worsening Circumstances

29.1. Applicants who are found to have deliberately given false information on their Homefinder Somerset Register application form will have their application reviewed immediately. This may result in the 'Band' awarded being changed as a result.

29.2. An immediate review of an application may also be undertaken if an applicant is found to have deliberately changed or worsened their housing situation in order to be placed into a band higher than they would normally have been awarded. If an applicant is re-housed through false information, steps may be taken to end the tenancy and court action may be taken which could result in the applicant receiving a fine up to a maximum of £5,000. Any applicant who is deemed to have deliberately worsened their circumstances will only receive an assessment based on their circumstances before they were worsened.

29.3. All landlords in this agreement are committed to taking legal action against any applicant found to have gained a tenancy based on false information in their application form. (Section 171 of the Housing Act 1996).

30. Access to Personal Information

30.1. Individuals are entitled under the Data Protection Act (1998) to request details of their personal data held by the five Local Authorities. A charge may be made for providing this information.

30.2. The information received, in conjunction with housing applications, may also be used for housing management and research purposes.



31. Monitoring

31.1. A number of areas within the CBL system will be monitored on a regular basis to ensure that the system is operating in the most effective way. Areas to be monitored may include:-

- Number of registrations received
- Percentage of applicants registered and notified within 15 working days
- Number and percentage of applicants registered within each band
- Number of proper ties advertised by type, area, landlord
- Number of proper ties advertised with local connection label
- Number of proper ties, with reasons, excluded from CBL system, by landlord (e.g. decants)
- Number of expressions of interest and method of expressing
- Number of expressions of interest for each property by band
- Profile of those expressing an interest (e.g. waiting list, transfer, homeless, disabled, ethnic background)
- Number of applicants bypassed for breach of tenancy conditions
- Number of accepted offers by band
- Number of tenancies refused at sign up
- Number of properties re-advertised due to difficulty in letting
- Number of review requests
- Number of complaints
- Number of applicants in short term supported housing awaiting active re-housing (following confirmation by scheme of readiness to move)
- Number of homeless applicants in 'Gold Band' awaiting re-housing (not expressing an interest)
- Number of 'Gold Band' applicants who have not expressed an interest in a property for more than 6 months
- Number of Emergency Priority applicants awaiting re-housing
- Number of applicants from outside the Homefinder Somerset area being re-housed
- Banding the property is advertised in
- The use of labelling
- Number of people housed by band

32. Equal Opportunities

32.1. All partners of Homefinder Somerset are committed to a fair and equitable housing policy and to providing equal opportunities for all when allocating available properties. All housing applicants will be assessed according to their housing need and in accordance with the published lettings policy.

32.2. All partners of Homefinder Somerset are opposed to direct or indirect discrimination and recognise the need for appropriate systems to actively prevent discrimination on the basis of race, colour, ethnic or national origins, gender, sexuality, marital status, religion, physical disability or mental health. Any allegations or concerns that an organisation has not acted appropriately have to be made directly to that organisation. All partner landlords are publicly accountable and must have a complaints policy and an independent Ombudsman.



33. Social Inclusion

33.1. All partners of Homefinder Somerset believe that applicants should be given every assistance to access the housing register and search for suitable properties. For example, the provision of the Homefinder Somerset 'Hotline' number will assist those applicants who experience literacy problems or who are blind or partially sighted and unable to read the adverts.

33.2. The Mental Capacity Act 2005 came into effect, in England, in April 2007 introducing a major overhaul of the law relating to individuals who lack capacity in decision making, particularly around changes in accommodation. The Act introduces a legal obligation on health and social care commissioners to jointly commission advocacy services and also has significant implications for the provision of supported housing, care and support services. To assist further, all statutory and voluntary agencies who work within the community either helping or advising applicants have been given information and training in order to fully understand the Homefinder Somerset Scheme and thereby assist at first hand their clients to search and apply for suitable housing.

33.3. To further assist applicants the following methods may be used:-

- Applicants potentially disadvantaged by the scheme will initially be identified from the application form. Staff will contact these applicants and offer them a home visit or interview. Staff will seek to establish what the support needs are and identify ways of enabling the applicants to participate in the CBL system. This may include sending copies of the adverts in large print to an applicant or simply providing advice.
- If the applicant agrees, staff may contact any professional or voluntary workers from health or Social Services with whom the applicant is involved to ensure they understand the procedures and that necessary support is provided. All agencies funded through Supporting People should be in a position to provide their clients with help on housing issues.
- Disadvantaged applicants are able to nominate a person (including family members, friends or professional worker) to express an interest on their behalf or to help them express an interest for suitable properties in the office.
- An alternative is for Homefinder Somerset staff to automatically put the applicants forward for vacancies that would be suitable, in the small number of cases where the applicant has no support.

34. Policy Review

34.1. The Homefinder Somerset Scheme is regularly reviewed to ensure that the policy meets its stated objectives and complies with legislative changes. Any changes to the Common Lettings Policy are implemented only after prior notice to members and the majority agreement amongst the partner landlords.



35. Complaints

35.1. Any complaints regarding the scheme should be directed initially to the organisation processing an applicant's claim.

36 The Housing Ombudsman

36.1. If an applicant is not satisfied with the action taken by either the Local Authority or a Registered Provider of social housing and has exhausted the complaints procedure available, they can send a written complaint to the ombudsman.

The Housing Ombudsman Service can be contacted at:

Housing Ombudsman Service
81 Aldwych London WC2B 4HN

Tel: 0300 111 3000
Minicom 020 7404 7092
Fax 020 7831 1942

[Email info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

Web address www.ihos.org.uk

The Local Government Ombudsman

PO Box 4771 Coventry CV4 DEH

LGO Advice Team on 0300 061 0614
www.lgo.org.uk



APPENDIX I

Disrepair Guidance

Gold: High

Based on the conditions identified the Private Sector Housing Team has deemed your home to have the presence of Category 1 hazards, Bands A - C (Housing Health & Safety Rating System) that CANNOT be resolved or reduced to a Category 2 hazard within 6 months.

Silver: Medium

Based on the conditions identified the Private Sector Housing Team has shown that your home has Category 1 hazards, Bands A - C (Housing Health & Safety Rating System) that CAN be resolved or reduced to a Category 2 hazard within 6 months.

And/or has shown that your home has Category 2 hazards, Band D (Housing Health & Safety Rating System).

Bronze: Low

No significant hazards identified justifying enforcement action by the local authority.



APPENDIX 2

Medical Considerations

When ill health, disability or old age is aggravated by housing conditions and would improve if other accommodation were offered. The award for medical consideration is a range from Gold to Bronze Band.

Low	Minor Problems	Bronze
Medium	Moderate Problems	Silver
High	Serious Problems Medical issue(s) which have a serious impact on your housing need or make it unreasonable to remain in your current accommodation.	Gold
Urgent	Urgent Medical need which is life threatening or which is causing bed blocking with hospital/care facility	Emergency

(See following examples which are for guidance only)

In the case of stress this will be reflected when deciding on banding.

The two crucial factors that are looked for in any awards of medical conditions are:

1. The physical link between the identified medical complaint and the current housing accommodation/situation.
2. That there is a realistic expectation that the identified medical condition would improve if alternative, more suitable accommodation was made available.

The Housing Team will carefully consider any representation received and check the circumstances outlined with any banding award that may have previously been made. Where there is a need, a change to banding will be made. You do not normally need to submit medical certificates or letters from your GP. However, no supporting evidence is refused and may assist the Housing Officer in assessing your application. Please note that the Local Authority will not pay any costs associated with the provision of supporting medical evidence.

When determining what banding to award, staff should approach the matter from the standpoint of assessing what degree of need exists and, secondly, what adverse effect this has on the lifestyle of the household as a whole?

To achieve consistency in the allocation of banding under this heading a descending schedule is detailed below.



High Problems – Gold Band. This band will be reserved for those cases where an applicant's or tenant's housing need is seriously affected by their medical conditions and those conditions are so serious that it is unreasonable for them to remain in their current accommodation.

Please note that gold band will only be made where the property cannot be adapted to meet the applicants needs or funds are not available for such adaptations or landlord permission cannot be obtained.

Example 1: An elderly applicant who the medical specialists will not allow to be discharged from hospital back to a second floor split-level flat which necessitates the climbing of stairs both to gain access and also within the flat itself. This person suffers from a chronic heart condition and the only accommodation available to them would place their life at risk. This view is amplified when further research reveals that the applicant lives alone, has virtually no contact with any neighbours, becoming in effect, a prisoner within the flat should the medical authorities decide to discharge him/ her from hospital.

Example 2: Mr Stevens, a frail, elderly gentleman, lives on his own in an old caravan in the grounds of a house in a country area. The only mains service is electricity. He fetches his water from an outside cold water tap and must use an Elsan bucket toilet situated some distance from the caravan. Mr Stevens suffers from dizzy spells, arthritis and was admitted to hospital as a result of the cold during the winter and the danger of falls when collecting water or using the outside toilet.

NOTE: The location of the toilet and water supply are contributory factors when arriving at the decision that this elderly gentleman is vulnerable.

Numerous examples could, of course, be given and one thinks of a younger applicant or tenant where housing circumstances have driven them into a situation where medical authorities and/or social workers feel there is a risk of suicide or child abuse etc.

NOTE: It is expected that any medical award, which is assessed to be an serious problem, will be linked to medical or social service recommendations that have been received by the Housing Team.

Medium/Moderate Problems – Silver Band. This again is a high banding award and should only be used to reflect moderate medical difficulties that have a clear relationship to existing housing circumstances. It is distinguished from the previous sub-division (i.e. Serious Problems) because in this instance the person's life cannot be considered to be at risk.

Example 1: Mrs Smith, an elderly widow, lives on her own in a first floor flat. She suffers from severe rheumatoid arthritis, and is unable to climb stairs. As a consequence she is housebound.



- Example 2:** Mrs Coles is living with her common-law husband in a rented property. Mrs Coles considers that their relationship has broken down, although her common-law husband refuses to accept this fact. Whilst she has not been subjected to physical violence, there is a great deal of mental cruelty which has led to Mrs Coles seeking the help of a Consultant Psychiatrist and being unable to work for several months. She has been advised that her mental health is being affected by her relationship with her common-law husband. In a case such as this, it would be essential for the Housing staff to consult the Community Physician before making a banding award.
- Example 3:** Mr and Mrs Brown, are both aged 70, are the owner-occupiers of a large Victorian property. Mrs Brown also suffers from osteoarthritis and now finds mobility painful, which is aggravated by this large dwelling, where only the WC facilities are on an upper floor. Mr Brown has a blood disorder and has considerable problems keeping warm, which is aggravated by this old property with its large rooms and high ceilings. The GP is concerned on both accounts and has advised the Housing Team accordingly.

With both serious and significant problems officers have a certain amount of discretion regarding the award. This will be of particular use to visiting officers in assessing the degree of seriousness of any medical problem.

Low/Minor Problems – Bronze Band. The degree of the problem is clearly less severe.

- Example 1:** A couple in their early 60s have signs of generalised arthritis and rheumatics. There are some difficulties with the accommodation because it is difficult to maintain a constant temperature during winter months. The garden is also becoming an increasing chore, but out of a sense of pride the occupants continue to try and keep on top of it.
- Example 2:** Minor problems relating to recurring colds or regular depression or unusual allergies could be pointed under this heading providing a link to the existing accommodation could be demonstrated.

Conclusion

When Staff should refer Medical Assessments to the Assessment Panel

The Housing Team will carry out the majority of assessments under the Medical Consideration element. However, there will be occasions when the advice of either the Somerset Primary Care Trust or Now Medical will need to be sought or a referral made to the medical Assessment Panel. For example, where an applicant's housing circumstances are affecting their mental health, or where a GP considers a patient requires over-riding priority as a result of a medical problem.



We may seek an independent medical opinion whenever an applicant does not normally fall within one of the priority categories under part VI and VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the homelessness Act 2002) and/or experiences health problems which are likely to make them vulnerable in a homeless situation. This information will be used to inform the relevant local authority officer to decide the Local Authority obligations.

The notes in the Manual should act as a guide to staff. The important aspect is to make a decision on what banding should be awarded and when. The Visiting Officer's report should set out in the rationale as to why bandings have been pitched at that particular level.

The following list covers some of the main factors, which can be reflected in a banding award under medical considerations.

1. Mobility - Inability to manage stairs/control-heating (e.g. put on extra clothing or adjust fire). size of accommodation, garden.
2. Applicants or tenants who are more or less confined to their existing accommodation, or where they depend on others to enable them to leave the dwelling.
3. Where present accommodation is causing the applicant's mental or physical disability, which could be overcome by a move to more suitable accommodation. The approach in this instance is to focus on how the applicant or tenant's circumstances could be improved by a move to alternative accommodation - banding will be awarded accordingly.

The possible link between Applicants or Tenants who are assessed to have high Medical Problems (Gold Band) and recognising the scope to regard the Application as an 'Emergency Band'.

Medical factors can constitute one of the most urgent forms of housing need. Housing staff should scrutinise, with extreme care, applications which attract Gold Banding for Medical Consideration. It may be appropriate to consider the application as an Emergency Banding.



APPENDIX 3

Glossary of Terms about Choice Based Lettings

Advertising Period - The number of days in which a applicant has the opportunity to express an interest' in a home once it is advertised.

Cancellation of applications – this will mean the closing of an application on the system.
Choice Based Lettings (CBL) - A new system being introduced for the allocation of social housing. CBL is designed to offer more choice and involvement for applicants in selecting a new home. It is a much more open, transparent and customer-based approach in the allocation of proper ties.

Consultation Period - A period of three months in which Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council, South Somerset District Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset District Council consulted with all interested par ties and stakeholders about its plans to introduce Choice Based Lettings. The initial consultation period was from May 2007 to August 2007 . A subsequent consultation took place between October 2010 and December 2010.

Express an Interest - - To be considered for an available home, applicants are required to contact us to 'express an interest' or 'bid' for a property. No money is involved in 'making a bid' or 'expressing an interest' in a property.

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System is a way of assessing properties to calculate the level of hazard (category 1, 2 etc.) or risk to health of a vulnerable household living or residing in that property. <http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/rentingandletting/housinghealth/> and <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/hhssoperatingguidance>

Housing Register - A list of applicants for housing accommodation.

Banding Scheme - The system currently used by the Homefinder Somerset Scheme to determine the priority of a applicants housing need. Banding is allocated to the applicant to reflect their current circumstances and future housing need. The banding allocated determines the applicant's position in the waiting list for a particular type/size/location of a home.

Property Label - A description of the property being advertised as available to let. The label will generally include a photograph, location, type of property, number of bedrooms, type of heating, any disabled adaptations, whether there is a garden or not, if pets are accepted and other features. The label will indicate who may be eligible to express an interest for the property. This could include, for example, where a local connection may be required, if there is an age restriction or the property has adaptations.

Registered Provider – This is a term introduced by the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 applying to housing associations registered with the Homes and Communities Agency. Registered Providers have access to Social Housing Grant public funding for the capital costs of providing housing.



Shortlist - Once the deadline has passed for registering an interest in a property, a list of those that have expressed an interest, who have met the advertising criteria for each individual property is generated by the computer system. Generally, the applicant offered the property will be the person who has been in the highest housing needs band for the longest period of time.

Social Rented Housing - Housing of a high standard, which is provided at below market cost for households in housing need by local Authorities and Registered Providers. It operates on a basis of accepted and regulated standards of good practice in relation to physical conditions, management, allocation, equal opportunities and accountability. The Homes and Communities Agency sets the maximum rent levels.

Impact Assessment form and action table

<p>What are you completing this impact assessment for? E.g. policy, service area</p> <p>Homefinder Somerset Choice Based Lettings Scheme</p>	<p>Service: Strategic Housing</p>
<p>Section One – Aims and objectives of the policy /service</p>	
<p>The scheme provides a “Housing Options Hub” for Somerset bringing together a range of housing options including shared ownership, low cost home ownership, Choice Based Lettings and mutual exchanges. All applicants for housing are assessed under one clear lettings policy ensuring the ultimate transparency and convenience for service users. The scheme has joined up the 5 district councils’ common housing registers.</p> <p>The development of one application form (paper based and available online) which captures all the relevant housing needs data gives applicants the opportunity to bid for all social housing across Somerset; a significant improvement in customer service and accessibility to the service across the County.</p> <p>The Homefinder scheme aims to offer greater choice and transparency, whilst continuing to meet housing need. The aim of this EIA is to ensure that applicants are empowered to make their own choices and decisions whilst providing the support required enabling people to do so.</p>	
<p>Section two – Groups that the policy or service is targeted at and main stakeholders in relation to the policy</p>	
<p>Those in housing need, customers wanting to transfer, those whom the Council has accepted a homelessness duty towards</p> <p>Stakeholders: Tenants, residents, households on the housing register, homeless households, voluntary organizations – support groups, Housing Associations, Arms Length Management Organization</p>	
<p>Section three – Groups that the policy or service is delivered by</p>	
<p>The 5 district councils and RSL partners.</p>	
<p>Section four – Evidence and Data used for assessment</p>	
<p>During July 2009 South Somerset District Council Scrutiny Committee decided to review Choice Based Lettings/Homefinder Somerset; this was primarily because a number of members had received enquiries and complaints from their constituents as they didn’t understand the scheme or felt it was unfair.</p>	

The review focused on the customer experience/perspective.

As Homefinder Somerset was a countywide scheme with:

- One common housing register across Somerset (previously five separate registers).
- One lettings policy governs the work of all five authorities.
- Shared IT provision.

Members felt it would be beneficial to conduct a joint task and finish review with members and officers across Somerset.

South Somerset District Council approached the Scrutiny Chairs and Officers across Somerset and invited them to join the review. Collectively the representatives from the authorities agreed a structure, ambition, terms of reference and project plan for the review.

Due to the wide scope of the review, it was agreed that the work would be separated into themed areas:

- Consultation
- Policy
- Statistics and benchmarking
- Web and Publications

Each themed area had a dedicated officer and representation of members from across the County. This ensured the review was truly countywide and provided a contact point at each council for every element of the review.

Also, the Homefinder Somerset partnership undertook a review of the common allocation policy through a public consultation exercise with both applicants and also with other stakeholders being asked a series of 33 or 34 questions on proposed changes.

The Homefinder Somerset Review Group agreed to sample 10% of active applicants for the consultation. With those that didn't have email addresses being written to. A total of 2169 applicants were contacted for the consultation (1093 were written to across all 5 local authority partners, and 1076 applicants were emailed).

All the housing providers within the Homefinder Somerset partnership were emailed requesting their feedback. In addition all other stakeholders that had an email contact address were emailed asking them to complete the questionnaire.

The consultation period ran from the 17th October to the 9th December 2010. There were 293 responses to the applicants' survey and 74 responses to the stakeholder survey.

53% of those responding to the stakeholder survey were landlords. The remainder were staff or members within the local authority partners, other smaller stakeholders, tenant panels and

housing forum respondents and parish councils.

Section Five - Conclusions drawn about the impact of service/policy/function on different groups highlighting negative impact or unequal outcomes

Views of the relevant groups/experts on the issues involved:

Scrutiny Review

- Problems bidding for those without computers – system viewed by customers as unfair and excluding e.g. older people
- Not understand the bidding cycle/that properties are advertised on a weekly basis
- Bidding via the telephone – too involved with too many lines and hashes to be pressed etc. Also the terminology on the phone line is different to the internet i.e. memorable date. All wording should be consistent between phone line, internet, letters etc.
- I am unable to use a computer, I do not have access to a computer and am unwell, and without adequate support how do I gain access to social housing?
- The telephone bidding is a problem as if people do not have access to the internet they cannot see the view of the property and they cannot always make a correct assumption on the suitability of the property from the recorded message. Maybe if the newsletters could be made more accessible somehow they would have a better chance of bidding for the properties they want.
- Some of the elderly or vulnerable clients may miss out on bidding as they do not understand and have no way of getting into our offices and we struggle to assist them due to demand in the office.
- Elderly people who not only struggle to use a computer, but also struggle with phoning to make a bid. This is also true for other, more vulnerable customers e.g. people with learning disabilities. Some customers may not bid at all if they don't understand when and how to bid.
- Elderly & vulnerable people without support struggle with bidding – there are probably people who have not registered at all on the scheme and are unaware of the scheme.
- I feel the scheme does not cater for the most vulnerable who need a high level of support such as street homeless, elderly and the infirm. Most have no support network and have no idea how to use a computer and should not be expected to learn (the elderly or illiterate which is unreasonable) to gain access to housing. Some elderly do not even have the ability to make phone calls due to Alzheimer's and the like. There is not sufficient staff to monitor and 'bid' for these groups and voluntary groups are under strain and also cannot manage to support all who need it. I feel the most at risk/need in society are missing out on an asset which is predominantly for the low paid, disadvantaged in society and feel very frustrated by it.
- It alienates those who are not computer literate.
- Not great for people who are not technology astute.
- Customers living in remote areas with no internet/computer access.
- Phone line isn't a great alternative to the web based version. Internet access is not available easily to all and required weekly to actively partake.
- I feel it is accessible to most people but not all as if resident' don't have the internet they will sometimes not apply as the phone line is chargeable and people either can't afford to keep ringing or don't want to spend the money.
- Difficult for people who do not speak English too understand the bidding system.

- Many of the most vulnerable people we see struggle to access their entitlement to bid or understand the process. Reasons for this include; learning difficulties, mental ill health, lack of finance, lack of access to internet or telephone, lack of help from Local Authority.

Allocation Policy Review

- Too many people from out of Taunton Deane are being offered properties which should really go to local people. As stated before, some HA's seem to be picking applicants and refusing for non-valid reasons, leaving local councils to pick up most homeless, and difficult cases.
- I think that the system is more difficult to access for older persons. This is reflected in the number of bids for this type of accommodation.
- Think the bidding procedure is more difficult for the elderly to understand.
- I don't think they are labelled correctly to reflect certain things, local connection etc...
- Due to the way supported housing is advertised incorrect applicants are being offered sheltered properties
- Older people who do not live in Yeovil are not catered for at all, quite often they are deaf and do not understand the process
- I still feel elderly people are not comfortable in using the system e.g. properties on sheltered scheme were advertised twice through CBL with limited response- when advertised in local newspaper properties were let quickly
- Ensure children of families in rural communities don't have to move away from their villages.
- The Gypsy and Traveller community seems to have been overlooked and there is not enough protection of Young People
- People get skipped or match rejected without a valid reason or any reason being given. People also get rejected due to issues/accusations which are not confirmed or substantiated. I thought Homefinder was supposed to be transparent and fair?
- Scheme needs more publicity still too many people that haven't heard of it
- Feel it is more than fair in terms of helping people who do not have English as their first language although the term 'bidding' can be confusing for older people who think money is involved.
- Am satisfied but feel we need other agencies & rural parishes to work more with us/be more aware of CBL registration & bidding system to get the message out there to everyone.

Section six – How will the assessment, consultation and outcomes be published and communicated?

Comments from customers and stakeholders discussed by the Homefinder Somerset Equalities and Diversity Sub-Group who proposed actions to combat the issues that arose.

These actions discussed at wider Homefinder Somerset Review Board and Monitoring Board.

Implications of implementing the proposed actions discussed at the Homefinder Somerset Operational Group and Working Group. The operational group is responsible for the implementation and operation of the ABRITAS IT system across all partners. The Working Group is responsible for the management of risks, including the development of contingency planning and for change control and any required configuration management.

Completed Impact Assessment update will be published on the Homefinder Somerset website alongside initial Equality Impact Assessment

Signed: Chair Homefinder Somerset Equalities and Diversity Sub-Group	<i>D E Baxter</i>	Signed: Chair Homefinder Somerset Monitoring Board	
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Identified issue drawn from your conclusions	Actions needed – how will your service or policy be amended	Who is responsible?	By when?	Is a monitoring system required?	Groups Affected	Expected outcomes from carrying out actions
<p>Problems bidding for those without computers – system viewed by customers as unfair and excluding e.g. older people</p> <p>I am unable to use a computer, I do not have access to a computer and am unwell, and without adequate support how do I gain access to social housing?</p> <p>It alienates those who are not computer literate.</p> <p>Customers living in remote areas with no internet / computer access.</p>	<p>Promote friends/careers welcome. Provide up-date training for support providers</p> <p>Promote paper option when clients make initial approach</p> <p>Promote and make clear use of auto-bid option & availability of proxy bidding by friend or helper</p> <p>Clear step-by-step instructions by PCs</p> <p>Promote visiting officers availability – ensure consistency across Las Use of auto-bidding where there is no internet access</p>	<p>Homefinder Operational Group</p> <p>District Housing Advice Managers</p> <p>Homefinder Operational Group</p> <p>District Housing Advice Managers and HA Partners if they have PCs for applicants to use District Housing Advice Managers</p>	<p>June 2011</p> <p>Completed – paper option available; need regular updates with CS staff to ensure consistency of advice; promote availability of HA staff to help</p> <p>Completed – booklets available at all IT service stations</p>	<p>Web site</p>	<p>Race; Disability; Age; Rural</p>	<p>Vulnerable people receive appropriate support</p> <p>Improved access for vulnerable groups to housing</p>
<p>Not understand the bidding cycle/that</p>	<p>Bidding booklets by PCs and explanation on</p>	<p>District Housing Advice Managers</p>	<p>Completed – booklets available at all IT service</p>		<p>Race; Disability; Age.</p>	<p>More people bidding successfully</p>

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properties are advertised on a weekly basis	website		stations_ There is a message on the home page of the website explaining the bidding cycles			
<p>Bidding via the telephone – too involved with too many lines and hashes to be pressed etc. Also the terminology on the phone line is different to the internet i.e. memorable date. All wording should be consistent between phone line, internet, letters etc.</p> <p>The telephone bidding is a problem as if people do not have access to the internet they cannot see the view of the property and they cannot always make a correct assumption on the suitability of the property from the recorded</p>	Promote the help available through advocacy or customers support network.	District Housing Advice Managers	April 2011	Minutes of Homefinder Monitoring Board	Race; Disability; Age; Gender; Rural.	<p>The property line as an easy option to bidding on-line</p> <p>Increase in phone bids</p>
	Promote help available through housing advisors		April 2011			
	Agree consistent wording.	Homefinder Operational Group	March 2011	Minutes of Operational Group		
	Review clarity of instructions on the phone line.	Homefinder Operational Group	March 2011			
Promote the availability of newsletters for friends/carers to pick-up or download	Operational Group and CBL Working Group and HA partners		March 2011	Minutes of Working Group		

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<p>message. Maybe if the newsletters could be made more accessible somehow they would have a better chance of bidding for the properties they want.</p> <p>Phone line isn't a great alternative to the web based version. Internet access is not available easily to all and required weekly to actively partake.</p> <p>I feel it is accessible to most people but not all as if resident' don't have the internet they will sometimes not apply as the phone line is chargeable and people either can't afford to keep ringing or don't want to spend the money.</p>	<p>Seek confirmation of particular issues. Ask questions on application; "are you able to access a telephone/PC?" Are you able to use a telephone/PC?"</p> <p>NO resources at present to provide free phone number – to remain under review</p>	<p>Homefinder Review Group; Operational Group</p> <p>Homefinder Operational Group</p>	<p>April 2011</p> <p>No further action – no additional resources to help 1% of applicants who bid in this way</p>	<p>Minutes of Homefinder Review Group</p>		<p>Customer Access Strategy</p>
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<p>Some of the elderly or vulnerable clients may miss out on bidding as they do not understand and have no way of getting into our offices and we struggle to assist them due to demand in the office.</p> <p>Elderly people who not only struggle to use a computer, but also struggle with phoning to make a bid. This is also true for other, more vulnerable customers e.g. people with learning disabilities. Some customers may not bid at all if they don't understand when and how to bid.</p> <p>There are probably people who have not</p>	<p>Encourage and support advocates, friends and support workers to offer help</p> <p>Promote the help available through housing advisors.</p> <p>Review publicity of the Homefinder scheme. Publicise/re-launch the scheme after the</p>	<p>District Housing Advice Managers and HA partners promote through tenants magazines etc</p> <p>District Housing Advice Managers / Operational Group/HA partners</p> <p>Homefinder Monitoring Board</p>	<p>April 2011</p> <p>April 2011</p> <p>Summer 2011</p>	<p>Web site</p> <p>Minutes Operational Group</p> <p>Minutes of Monitoring</p>	<p>Race; Age; Disability.</p>	<p>Vulnerable groups receive appropriate support</p> <p>Increase in number from vulnerable groups</p>

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<p>registered at all on the scheme and are unaware of the scheme.</p> <p>I feel the scheme does not cater for the most vulnerable who need a high level of support such as street homeless, elderly and the infirm. Most have no support network and have no idea how to use a computer and should not be expected to learn (the elderly or illiterate which is unreasonable) to gain access to housing. Some elderly do not even have the ability to make phone calls due to Alzheimer's and the like. There is not sufficient staff to monitor and 'bid' for these groups and voluntary groups are under strain and also</p>	<p>implementation of the policy changes</p> <p>If customers have limited mental capacity then they will struggle accessing all services generally, not just HFS. Offer more training for advocates and support workers.</p> <p>Encourage the offer of</p>	<p>Operational Group / Working Group</p> <p>District Housing Advice Managers; Working Group</p>	<p>June 2011</p>	<p>Board</p> <p>Minutes of Operational Group / Working Group</p>		
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<p>cannot manage to support all who need it. I feel the most at risk/need in society are missing out on an asset which is predominantly for the low paid, disadvantaged in society and feel very frustrated by it.</p> <p>I think that the system is more difficult to access for older persons. This is reflected in the number of bids for this type of accommodation.</p> <p>Feel it is more than fair in terms of helping people who do not have English as their first language although the term 'bidding' can be confusing</p>	<p>training on CBL as part of induction training for support workers in Adult Social Care, OTs etc</p> <p>Set up user group in order to understand ongoing issues</p> <p>Term 'bidding' changed to 'express an interest'</p>	<p>Homefinder Monitoring Board</p>	<p>June 2011</p> <p>Summer 2011</p> <p>Completed</p>	<p>Minutes of Working Group</p> <p>Minutes of Monitoring Board</p>		<p>Consistent improvement across all districts to Homefinder Somerset by addressing customer issues</p>
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for older people who think money is involved.						
Difficult for people who do not speak English too understand the bidding system.	Promote and publicise links to support agencies, language sites and help lines including translation services.	Somerset Equality Officers Group; Homefinder Operational Group	April 2011	Minutes of SEOG Minutes of Operational Group SLAs	Race.	Easier access to appropriate specialist sites via promotion and links between websites BME community receive appropriate support
I don't think they are labelled correctly to reflect certain things, local connection etc... Ensure children of families in rural communities don't have to move away from their villages.	Local lettings down to use of symbols and language. Review use of symbols – add symbols to enable clearer understanding	Homefinder Operational Group Homefinder Review Group	March 2011	Minutes of Operational Group Minutes of Review Group; Web site	Race; Disability; Age; Gender; Rural.	Scheme reflects strategic sustainability and mixed community issues Clearer understanding of circumstances at time of bidding
Due to the way supported housing is advertised incorrect applicants are being offered sheltered properties	Review labelling and terminology. Promote understanding of support needs and use of Supported Housing	Homefinder Review Group; District Housing Advice Managers	March 2011	Minutes of Homefinder Review Group Web site	Age, Disability	Customers circumstances are correct at the time of bidding to avoid disappointment of not being offered the property

<p>The Gypsy and Traveller community seems to have been overlooked and there is not enough protection of Young People</p>	<p>Promote scheme through gypsy and traveller forums. Seek to properly identify housing needs and numbers of gypsies and travellers in social housing. Make 'suitable provision through Gypsy and Traveller Strategy further to GTAA.</p> <p>Promote use of common guarantors, tenant accreditation and help in leaving care for young people</p>	<p>District Housing Advice Managers</p> <p>Strategic Housing Officers Group</p> <p>District Housing Advice Managers</p>	<p>July 2011</p> <p>September 2011</p> <p>March 2011</p>	<p>Minutes of SSHOG</p> <p>Web site</p>	<p>Race; Age</p>	<p>Gypsies & travellers receive appropriate support</p> <p>Increase in numbers of Young People accessing appropriate accommodation</p>
<p>People get skipped or match rejected without a valid reason or any reason being given. People also get rejected due to issues/accusations which are not confirmed or substantiated. I thought Homefinder was supposed to be transparent and fair?</p>	<p>Reasons for skipping have to be given – identify place on website where these can be found.</p>	<p>Homefinder Operational Group</p>	<p>Completed</p>			<p>Reduce time spent dealing with queries</p>
<p>Am satisfied but feel we need other agencies & rural parishes to work more with us/be more</p>	<p>Promote training to rural parishes.</p>	<p>Homefinder Operational Group</p>	<p>August 2011</p>	<p>Minutes of Operational Group</p>	<p>Rural.</p>	<p>Easier access to Homefinder Somerset</p>

aware of CBL registration & bidding system to get the message out there to everyone.						
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