

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Tenant Services Management Board – 20th August 2012

Homefinder Somerset Annual Report – 2011/2012

Report of Stephen Boland – Housing Services Lead

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

1.0 Executive Summary

Homefinder Somerset is the Choice Based Lettings partnership between the five local housing authorities and all the major housing associations within Somerset.

Homefinder Somerset has been operating for a number of years and an annual report provides all partner landlords and other agencies with information on the progress and outcomes achieved during financial year 2011/12.

Tenant Services Management Board is asked to note this report.

2.0 Introduction and background information

The Homefinder Somerset Annual Report – 2011/2012 (see Appendix 1) summarises the outcomes of Homefinder Somerset in the financial year 2011/12.

The report contains:

- Statistics about the Housing Register in Somerset and the lettings made by social landlords over the course of the year;
- Background information about Homefinder Somerset and how the scheme works (Appendix 1 part A);
- Information about the Monitoring Board and its membership is (Appendix 1 part B); and
- A summary of the main changes introduced after a review during 2010/11 (Appendix 1 part C)

As well as monitoring the outcomes of choice based lettings, the Monitoring Board looks closely at the time it takes local authorities to process housing applications and the size of any backlogs in each Council. It does this because delays in processing can affect a household's housing choices. This year all five local

authorities were virtually 100% up to date with processing both manual and on line forms at the end of March 2012.

The sweeping changes and choices introduced by the coalition government since 2010, including the introduction of flexible tenancies and the ability to charge affordable rents, coupled with more proposed changes under the Government's welfare reform plans, means that the Homefinder scheme has continued to evolve and will need to do so for some time to come. We will continue to review the changes and adapt our approach to meet local needs where necessary, so that Homefinder Somerset continues to achieve the best outcomes for the 19,000 applicants currently seeking good quality, affordable homes in Somerset.

3.0 Recommendation

Tenant Services Management Board is asked to note the contents of this report.

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Appendix 1



homefindersomerset.co.uk

Annual Activity Summary Report

2011/12



Magna West Somerset tenants who found their brand new home in Wheddon Cross, West Somerset through HomefinderSomerset in 2011. Wheddon Cross is in Exmoor National Park.



homefindersomerset.co.uk

Your home, your choice

1.0 Statistical Report 2011/12

1.1 Registered Applicants

1.11 Under Homefinder Somerset there is one common register which can be broken down by local authority area with applicants assigned, for administrative purposes, to the most appropriate local authority area.

1.12 The table below shows the number of registered applicant households by local authority area at the end of the last three financial years. Applicant numbers have decreased by 15% in the last year. The decrease is mainly a result of the administering local authorities carrying out the annual renewal process every month on the anniversary of each application. This exercise invariably leads to applicants not returning forms and being cancelled from the system. The benefit of carrying out the exercise on a rolling programme is that it spreads the workload for local authorities and evens out the impact on the statistics.

Local Authority	31.3.12	31.3.11	31.3.10
Mendip District Council	3580	3517	3036
Sedgemoor District Council	4698	4752	3940
South Somerset District Council	5220	6996	5146
Taunton Deane Borough Council	3758	5221	4853
West Somerset Council	1361	1481	1741
Total of Local Authority	18617	21967	18716

Table 1 Number of Active Registered Applicants on 31.03.12

1.2 Percentage of Registered Applicants in Each Band

1.21 The chart below shows the percentage of registered applicant households in each band by local housing authority area at 31st March 2012. Across Somerset, only six households were in the emergency band on 31st March 2012 and so the small percentage does not register on this chart. 8% of households were in gold band (varying from 7.5% in West Somerset to 8% in South Somerset which had the highest number of approved homeless cases). 47% were in silver band and 45% were in bronze (varying from 39% in Mendip to 55% in West Somerset). Whilst the percentage in the bronze band has remained relatively stable between 2011 and 2012, the number of households in the gold band has increased by just over 1% while numbers of households in the silver band have decreased by just less than 1%. This could reflect an increase in higher housing needs, it could be a result of the higher percentage of silver band applicants that were housed this year or it could be an outcome of the policy changes.

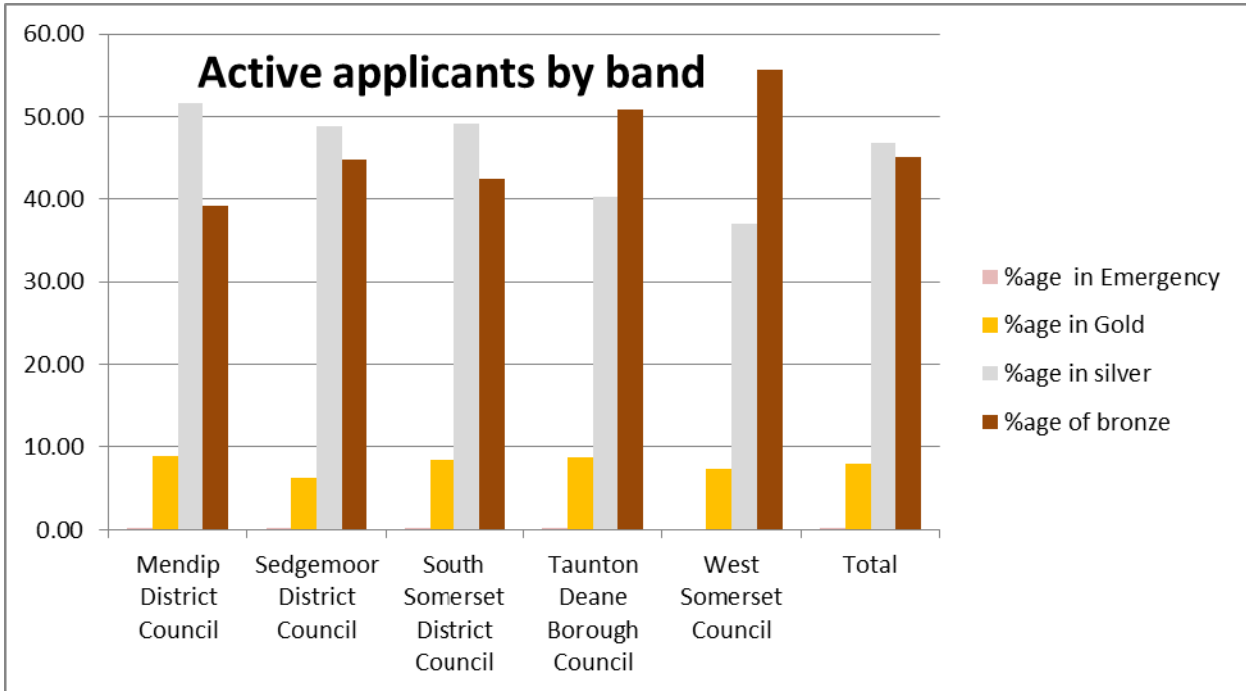


Table 2 Percentage of registered applicant households in each band by local housing authority area on 31.03.12

1.3 Ethnic Makeup of Registered Applicant Households

1.31 The table below provides details of applicants, by local authority, according to their ethnic origin on 31st March 2012. Excluding those applicants for whom we do not have ethnic details, 93.6% of applicants were white British and 5.08% were of black or minority ethnic origin. Later in this report there is a table showing accepted offers (lettings) by ethnic origin and this shows that a slightly higher percentage (5.31%) of lettings were made to applicants of a black or minority ethnic origin.

	Mendip District Council	Sedgemoor District Council	South Somerset District Council	Taunton Deane Borough Council	West Somerset Council	Total
Not completed	0.06	0.11	0.00	0.24	0.00	0.09
Any other group	0.34	0.23	0.40	0.24	0.44	0.32
Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi	0.03	0.15	0.12	0.13	0.07	0.11
Asian or Asian British Chinese	0.14	0.02	0.10	0.08	0.07	0.08
Asian or Asian British Indian	0.11	0.00	0.02	0.05	0.07	0.04
Asian or Asian British Pakistani	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01
Black or Black British African	0.08	0.08	0.12	0.21	0.00	0.11
Black or Black British Caribbean	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.11	0.22	0.10
Mixed White & Asian	0.20	0.21	0.12	0.21	0.22	0.18
Mixed White & Black African	0.20	0.13	0.27	0.16	0.00	0.18
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	0.28	0.28	0.25	0.16	0.22	0.24
Other Arab	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.05	0.00	0.02
Other Asian or Asian British background	0.08	0.06	0.15	0.19	0.15	0.12
Other Black or Black British background	0.06	0.00	0.04	0.08	0.00	0.04
Other Ethnic Group	0.17	0.17	0.29	0.24	0.15	0.21
Other Gypsy/Romany/Irish Traveller	0.20	0.08	0.19	0.08	0.15	0.14
Other mixed background	0.20	0.21	0.17	0.08	0.00	0.16
Other white background	3.44	2.42	3.93	2.87	0.95	3.02
Refused	0.53	0.15	0.12	0.45	0.51	0.30
Unavailable	1.37	1.42	0.31	0.75	1.25	0.95
White English	88.55	91.25	89.12	90.26	92.66	90.04
White Irish	0.53	0.59	0.40	0.56	0.37	0.50
White Other British	3.38	2.32	3.80	2.79	2.49	3.05
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 3 Ethnic Makeup of Registered Applicant Households 31.03.12

1.4 Age Profile Information

- 1.41 The tables below show age profile information for Somerset in percentages. The Monitoring Board continues to monitor these statistics closely due to concerns about access, in particular that the system is largely computer based. Measures taken so far to assist with and improve access have included reducing the size of the application form by 50%; improving the labelling of adapted properties; continuing to promote the various other forms of practical assistance available, such as help to fill in forms; encouraging family, friends and support workers to assist older people, and the use of auto-bidding where broadband is not available or where older people have no other help or support available to them.
- 1.42 The Monitoring Board will continue to monitor these statistics closely, in particular non-bidding. The Monitoring Board has requested that Local Authorities and landlords review non-bidding amongst older people and has requested that contact is made with all older non-bidders during 2012 to assess the need for and to offer further support and assistance.

Age band	Mendip District Council	Sedgemoor District Council	South Somerset District Council	Taunton Deane Borough Council	West Somerset Council	Total
17-20	9.6	9.2	10.5	8.8	7.3	9.4
21-29	22.7	23.2	25.0	21.5	19.3	23.0
30-39	20.6	20.1	20.9	21.8	17.6	20.6
40-59	30.6	28.6	26.1	27.2	30.4	28.1
60+	15.8	18.3	16.7	19.6	24.7	18.1
Not known	0.6	0.6	0.9	1.0	0.8	0.8
Grand Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 4 Age profile of active applicants 31.03.12

	Mendip District Council	Sedgemoor District Council	South Somerset District Council	Taunton Deane Borough Council	West Somerset Council	Total
17-20	8.68	6.37	8.4	10.12	4.07	8.21
21-29	25.69	29.35	30.3	28.89	20.35	28.38
30-39	18.23	17.39	21.1	19.17	25	19.57
40-49	17.36	14.6	15.3	13.05	15.7	15.02
50 - 59	11.98	12.27	8.5	11.05	11.05	10.66
60+	18.06	20.03	16.4	17.71	23.84	18.17
Date of birth not known	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 5 Age profile of accepted offers between 01.04.11 and 31.03.12

	Mendip District Council	Sedgemoor District Council	South Somerset District Council	Taunton Deane Borough Council	West Somerset Council	Total 2011-12
17-20	10.7	7.7	9.7	9.9	6.2	9.2
21-29	28.1	32.6	35.2	35.3	22.9	32.9
30-39	20.7	23.9	25.2	24.1	20.6	23.7
40-49	23.5	17.8	16.2	15.3	22.4	17.6
50-59	9.0	8.8	8.3	8.6	11.7	8.8
60+	8.0	9.2	5.4	6.8	16.3	7.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 6 Age Profile of Households Expressing an Interest in an Advertised Property between 04.04.11 and 01.04.12 (2011-12 advertising cycles)

	Mendip District Council	Sedgemoor District Council	South Somerset District Council	Taunton Deane Borough Council	West Somerset Council	Total
17-21	7.77	6.57	7.12	6.32	5.18	6.79
21-29	25.03	23.46	24.96	25.62	22.47	24.59
30-39	21.67	20.49	22.61	23.11	20.56	21.93
40-59	30.07	28.08	26.73	27.04	29.08	27.90
60+	15.21	21.18	18.26	17.71	22.45	18.53
Not Known	0.25	0.23	0.32	0.20	0.25	0.26
Grand Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 7 Age Profile of Households who have never Expressed an Interest in an Advertised Property between 01.04.11 and 31.03.12

	Mendip	Sedgemoor	South Somerset	Taunton Deane	West Somerset	Somerset
15-19	6.72	5.95	5.78	6.31	5.71	6.12
20-29	9.14	9.12	9.81	10.63	7.72	9.54
30-39	14.75	14.17	14.00	14.17	10.89	14.01
40-49	13.89	13.37	13.12	13.35	12.48	13.34
50-59	14.08	14.33	13.97	13.42	14.97	14.03
60+	22.41	24.70	25.04	24.21	33.38	24.84

Table 8 Census Data – 2001 Age Profile - Somerset

1.5 Property Adverts

1.51 The chart below details the total adverts placed by each landlord by local authority area in 2011/12. This ranged from only one or two adverts for landlords with low numbers of properties in Somerset through to Yarlington Housing Group with 1337 property adverts. This is an increase of 297, which is just over 7% on last year. This could be as a result of increased development activity, a higher turnover of properties or increased efficiency by landlords and in reality, is probably a combination of all of these factors.

	Mendip District Council	Sedgemoor District Council	South Somerset District Council	Taunton Deane Borough Council	West Somerset Council	Grand Total
Anchor Housing Association		2				2
Falcon Rural Housing Association		1		6	6	13
Flourish Homes	390					390
Guinness Hermitage	7	39				46
Habinteg Housing		2				2
Hanover					1	1
Hastoe HA	8		32			40
Homes in Sedgemoor		487				487
Jephson HA			124			124
Kennet Housing Society	3					3
Knightstone HA	51	24	13	42	6	136
Magna (West Somerset)		44		72	196	312
Magna HA Ltd			119			119
Places For People				28		28
Raglan HA Ltd	14	72	95	9	1	191
Redland HA				5		5
Sanctuary HA	10	18	77	21		126
Selwood Housing	2					2
SHAL		23	1	17		41
Signpost HA			39	2		41
Somer Community Housing Trust	7					7
South Somerset District Council			3			3
Southwestern Housing Society	1	21		3		25
Sovereign HA	4	98	3	45		150
Taunton Deane Borough Council				548		548
Taunton Heritage Trust				4		4
West Somerset Council					1	1
Western Challenge HA	3	4				7
William Sutton Homes			7			7
Wyvern Rural Housing Association	1		4			5
Yarlington Housing Group		186	1151			1337
Aster Communities	144					144
Grand Total	645	1021	1668	802	211	4347

Table 9 Property Adverts Placed by Landlords between 04.04.11 and 01.04.12 shown by Local Authority Area

1.6 Accepted Offers (Lettings)

1.61 The table below shows the number of accepted offers by landlords by band between 2011/12. In 2011/12, there were 3,143 accepted offers across Somerset, an increase of 395 (14%) on 2010/11 and 409 (15%) on 2009/10. 51% of accepted offers were to silver band applicants (an increase of 5% on 2010/11); 40% to gold (an decrease of 3% on 2010/11); 8% to bronze (a decrease of 1%) and 1% to the emergency band (no change). In comparison, silver band applicants made up 47% of the housing register; gold band 8%; bronze band 45% and emergency band less than 1%.

Landlord	Emergency	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
Flourish Homes	0.19	5.25	6.90	0.80	13.14
Falcon Rural Housing Association	0.00	0.06	0.32	0.16	0.54
Guinness Hermitage	0.00	0.10	0.67	0.41	1.18
Habinteg Housing	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.03
Hastoe HA	0.00	0.38	0.80	0.13	1.30
Homes in Sedgemoor	0.06	3.40	6.33	0.57	10.37
Jephson HA	0.00	0.80	0.64	0.06	1.50
Kennet Housing Society	0.00	0.16	0.00	0.00	0.16
Kilmersdon Rural Housing Association	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.03
Knightstone HA	0.10	2.23	2.32	0.41	5.06
Magna (West Somerset)	0.10	1.72	3.60	0.86	6.27
Magna HA Ltd	0.00	1.34	0.99	0.00	2.32
Places For People	0.00	0.29	0.22	0.13	0.64
Raglan HA Ltd	0.06	1.78	2.23	0.13	4.20
Redland HA	0.00	0.13	0.03	0.00	0.16
Sanctuary HA	0.00	1.72	0.64	0.13	2.48
Selwood Housing	0.00	0.06	0.06	0.00	0.13
SHAL	0.00	0.57	0.70	0.10	1.37
Signpost HA	0.00	0.32	0.35	0.19	0.86
Somer Community Housing Trust	0.00	0.19	0.03	0.00	0.22
Southwestern Housing Society	0.00	0.29	0.60	0.22	1.11
Sovereign HA	0.03	1.53	1.37	0.13	3.05
Taunton Deane Borough Council	0.00	7.25	6.46	1.75	15.46
Western Challenge HA	0.00	0.19	0.06	0.00	0.25
William Sutton Homes	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.03
Wyvern Rural Housing Association	0.00	0.06	0.06	0.00	0.13
Yarlington Housing Group	0.22	10.24	15.37	2.16	28.00
Grand Total	0.76	40.06	50.81	8.37	100.00

Table 10 Number of Accepted Offers (Lettings) by Landlords by Band 01.04.11 to 31.03.12

1.7 Accepted Offers within the Gold Band

- 1.71 Of the 40% of accepted offers to gold band applicants, just under 44% of these were to homeless households (as opposed to being 16% of all gold band applicants on the register) which represents 17% of all accepted offers made.
- 1.72 Of the 40% of accepted offers to gold band applicants, 18% were to gold band under-occupiers (as opposed to being 47% of all gold band applicants on the register) which represents 7% of all accepted offers.

1.8 Mobility within and into Somerset

- 1.81 The table below shows the numbers of accepted offers by landlord and local authority area. It is an interesting table as it demonstrates the increased mobility and flexibility for applicants in being able to move between local authority areas. For example, Taunton Deane Borough Council let 25 homes to applicants from Sedgemoor, 22 from South Somerset, 7 from West Somerset and 3 from Mendip. It also shows that county-wide 195 applicants were housed from outside Somerset which equates to 6.2% of the total accepted offers (3143). Unfortunately, Homefinder does not allow us to monitor the mobility of Somerset residents leaving Somerset to be re-housed elsewhere as a result of choice based lettings schemes.
- 1.82 The last table shows accepted offers by ethnic origin and as mentioned earlier 5.31% of accepted offers were from applicants of a black or minority ethnic origin.

Row Labels	Mendip District Council	Outside Homefinder Somerset Area	Sedgemoor District Council	South Somerset District Council	Taunton Deane Borough Council	West Somerset Council	Grand Total
Aster Communities	352	20	13	23	4	1	413
Falcon Rural Housing Association			2		7	8	17
Guinness Hermitage	4		32	1			37
Habinteg Housing			1				1
Hastoe HA	18			22	1		41
Homes in Sedgemoor	10	31	243	9	27	6	326
Jephson HA	8	2	2	33	2		47
Kennet Housing Society	3	1		1			5
Kilmersdon Rural Housing Association	1						1
Knightstone HA	42	8	19	19	61	10	159
Magna (West Somerset)	4	22	19	5	41	106	197
Magna HA Ltd	3	5	3	62			73
Places For People			2	1	15	2	20
Raglan HA Ltd	21	9	32	55	13	2	132
Redland HA				1	4		5
Sanctuary HA	9	3	25	17	24		78
Selwood Housing	3			1			4
SHAL	3	2	21	3	13	1	43
Signpost HA	2		2	21	1	1	27
Somer Community Housing Trust	5	1		1			7
Southwestern Housing Society	2		28	2	2	1	35
Sovereign HA	7	2	30	15	40	2	96
Taunton Deane Borough Council	3	21	25	22	408	7	486
Western Challenge HA	4		2		2		8
William Sutton Homes					1		1
Wyvern Rural Housing Association	1			3			4
Yarlington Housing Group	34	68	89	622	62	5	880
Grand Total	539	195	590	939	728	152	3143

Table 11 Accepted offers between Homefinder Somerset Local Authorities by Landlord 01.04.11 to 31.03.12

	Mendip District Council	Sedgemoor District Council	South Somerset District Council	Taunton Deane Borough Council	West Somerset Council	Total
Any other group	0.17	0.16	0.30	0.80	0.00	0.35
Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi	0.17	0.00	0.30	0.13	0.00	0.16
Asian or Asian British Indian	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Asian or Asian British Pakistani	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Asian or Asian British Chinese	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Black or Black British African	0.35	0.00	0.30	0.27	0.00	0.22
Black or Black British Caribbean	0.00	0.16	0.20	0.00	0.58	0.13
Mixed White & Asian	0.00	0.16	0.10	0.13	0.58	0.13
Mixed White & Black African	0.17	0.16	0.30	0.13	0.00	0.19
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	0.00	0.16	0.00	0.00	0.58	0.06
Other Arab	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Other Black or Black British background	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.13	0.00	0.03
Other Asian or Asian British background	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Other Ethnic Group	0.17	0.47	0.50	0.13	0.00	0.32
Other Gypsy/Romany/Irish Traveller	0.17	0.00	0.10	0.13	0.00	0.10
Other mixed background	0.00	0.16	0.50	0.13	0.58	0.25
Other white background	4.86	4.19	4.10	2.66	0.58	3.72
Refused	0.17	0.00	0.10	0.27	0.00	0.13
Unavailable	0.87	0.78	0.10	1.20	1.74	0.73
White English	89.24	90.06	89.90	91.08	90.12	90.10
White Irish	0.35	0.78	0.20	0.53	0.58	0.45
White Other British	2.95	2.48	2.70	1.46	4.65	2.51
Blank	0.00	0.16	0.00	0.53	0.00	0.16
Grand Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 12 Accepted Offers by Ethnic Origin 01.04.11 to 31.03.12

Part A What is Homefinder Somerset?

When Homefinder Somerset was launched in December 2008 it was the first sub-regional county-wide Choice Based Lettings scheme in the South West. The work and commitment of all parties (five local authorities and over 30 housing associations) to agree and implement a unified scheme for the whole county was a considerable achievement.

Homefinder Somerset is a partnership of local authorities and housing associations who are working together to make the process of finding a home simple and transparent for all applicants looking for housing in Somerset. Anyone looking for social housing anywhere in Somerset only has to complete one application form and their needs will be assessed against the same clear set of criteria. Applicants are then able to use the Choice Based Lettings service to apply for homes that they are interested in. The scheme includes existing tenants who would like to transfer.

How the Scheme Works

Applicants complete the application form (usually on-line) and following assessment of their circumstances, they are placed into one of four bands, gold, silver, bronze or in a very small number of cases an emergency band. Once registered with Homefinder Somerset, applicants are advised of their banding, application date and personal reference number which enables them to bid for appropriate homes which are advertised on a weekly basis. The adverts appear on the Homefinder website and other media such as the telephone helpline. Advertising cycles are weekly beginning on Wednesday and closing on the following Sunday.

Applicants are only able to express an interest in properties for which they are eligible. (To express an interest for a property simply means to apply for that property.) There are a number of issues that affect the ability to do this:

1. Applicants are only able to express an interest for selected properties which match the needs of their household.
2. In some cases there may be age restrictions on a property. If this is the case it is clearly shown on the property advert using the appropriate symbols.
3. Properties may be labelled to give preference to certain applicants. For example, households accepted by one of the partner housing associations as homeless and in priority need.
4. Applicants are allowed to make up to three expressions of interest in each advertising period but can withdraw these and re-use them on another property up until the close of the advertising cycle.
5. A tenancy will not usually be given to applicants under the age of 18 years without a "guarantor".

Applications are banded according to the degree of their housing need and high need applicants are placed in the gold band, medium need applicants in the silver band and low need in the bronze band. Gold band applicants, for example, may be statutorily homeless or overcrowded, have a high medical need or live in a property in the private sector which has a high degree of disrepair. Silver band applicants reflect a medium level of housing need and for example may have a degree of overcrowding (lacking one bedroom in current

home), need to move for employment reasons or to give or receive support or have a medium medical need or disrepair of the current property. Applicants in bronze band will have a low or no housing need and for example will be generally adequately housed, be financially able to meet their own housing needs, have low medical, welfare or disrepair assessment or who perhaps own their own property but the home is not suitable for their needs.

The process adopted by landlords to make offers to successful applicants and let the properties is as follows. All expressions of interest received in any given advertising cycle are put in priority order to produce a list of eligible applicants for each property. Ordinarily preference is given to the applicant in the highest band and then with the earliest registration date. The landlord will complete any verification checks and if they are unable to offer the property to the applicant at the top of the list they will move to the next applicant and so on. The decision to reject particular applicants is made by the landlord on a case by case basis, for example many participating landlords will reject applicants who have a history of anti social behaviour or have a debt with their current or former landlord.

The Homefinder web site also displays information on the outcomes of previous advertising cycles, showing the number of expressions of interest received and the band and registration date for the successful applicant (but no personal data) against the addresses of previously advertised properties. Applicants can therefore gauge (by comparison with their own band and registration date) the types of properties and locations that they are more likely to be successful with and use their three expressions of interest in each cycle more effectively.

Part B The Homefinder Somerset Monitoring Board

The Monitoring Board was created to oversee the outcomes arising from the administration and development of the Homefinder Somerset Scheme on behalf of all the partner local authorities and landlords.

The Board is made up of representatives from each of the five local authorities and the five principal landlords in the county together with a further five places for representatives from the other participating landlords (a total of a maximum of 15 members). Two of the places on the Board are reserved for a representative of a special needs housing provider and a rural housing provider and there are also co-opted members.

During 2011/12 the Monitoring Board met four times. The Monitoring Board has a number of sub-committees and groups namely the Equalities and Diversity Sub-Committee and the Operational Group. During the period of the review, the Monitoring Board also set up a Review Group.

At 31st March 2012 the membership of the Monitoring Board was as follows:

Local Housing Authority Representatives:

David Jones, Taunton Deane Borough Council (Strategic Function) (Vice Chair)
Colin McDonald, South Somerset District Council (Past Chair 2009)
Jerry Milton, Sedgemoor District Council
Ian Timms, West Somerset Council (Past Chair 2011)
Jai Vick, Mendip District Council

Principal Landlord Representatives:

Christine Boland, Magna West Somerset Housing Association (Chair)
Stephen Boland, Taunton Deane Borough Council (Landlord Services)
Margaret Wright, Aster Communities
Nick Fry, Yarlinton Housing Group
Claire Tough, Homes in Sedgemoor

Other Landlord Representatives:

Kathryn Hemensley, Knightstone Housing Association
Shirley Evans-Jones, Hastoe Housing Association (Rural Provider)
Mary Firth, Barnabas Housing (Special Needs Provider)
Jane Vernoit, Mendip YMCA
Toni Beard Magna Housing Association (to be confirmed)

Co-options & Ex-officio:

Vacant, Commissioning Care and Support
Kirsty Larkins/Debbie Warr, South Somerset District Council (Chair, Operational Group)
Dave Baxter, Sedgemoor District Council (Chair, Equalities & Diversity Sub Committee)

Part C Summary of Key Changes arising from the Review of Homefinder Somerset

During 2010 a review group made up of all the Somerset Local Housing Authorities and a number of partner landlords undertook a review of the Homefinder Somerset scheme.

The review recommended some amendments to the policy, the application form and the system that is used to assess housing register applications and operates the Choice Based Lettings allocations process.

Key Policy Changes

1. An applicant's finances will be assessed to establish if they can meet their own housing needs – this assessment is based on whether an applicant is earning above average earnings for the Somerset area;
2. The assessment of the level of medical considerations has changed. Gold Band criteria will be reduced from Life Threatening to Serious medical conditions and the Silver Band criteria will be reduced from Significant to Moderate medical conditions. This will benefit applicants as the criteria have been 'reduced';
3. Households who match 4 or more Silver Band 'housing needs' will be awarded Gold Band status for cumulative housing need;
4. Tenants of Homefinder Somerset Partners, who live in Somerset and are required to relocate due to major rebuilding or renovation works, will be placed in Gold Band to facilitate the rebuilding/renovation works;
5. The priority previously given to households with children under 10 that have no access to an enclosed garden has been removed as a consideration for silver banding (so that these households do not have the same priority as applicants who are homeless);
6. 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 any additional bedrooms (this previously only benefitted single applicants);
7. We have made it clearer within the policy when a property can be advertised with priority given to local applicants;
8. We have provided 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 allocations policy;
9. Homeless cases awarded Gold Band status that do not express an interest in suitable properties within 8 – 16 weeks may have automatic expressions of interest placed on their behalf by the relevant Local Authority for suitable properties – applicants will be consulted before this change is imposed;

10. In order to reduce the number of applicants refusing offers, applicants who refuse 3 formal suitable offers may be placed into Bronze Band for 3 months, this would exclude accepted homeless cases;

Key Application Form Changes

11. The length of the application form has been reduced by 50% from 56 pages to 27 pages. The form is now much simpler and focuses on the information required to assess their housing need only.
12. These changes are reflected both in the manual housing register form and the online housing register form available at www.homefindersomerset.co.uk

Key System Changes

13. There have been major changes made to the back office system to reflect the policy and application form changes.
14. Additional functionality has been added into the system in the property advert fields to enable landlords to better market properties.
15. Changes were made in anticipation of the affordable rents and flexible tenancies changes proposed in the Localism Bill, now contained in the Localism Act 2011.