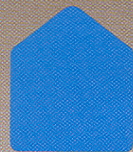


Stephen Rudge
Head of Housing Policy &
Services
Coventry City Council

Your GUIDE to Coventry Homefinder



Coventry
HOMEFINDER

Letting you choose

Why everyone wants to be sent to Coventry

Imagine a city where, each day, 37 more families choose to live in a social home. *Martin Hilditch* discovers the secret to Coventry's appeal. *Illustration by Karine Faou*

If social housing providers in Coventry were in any other business they would be celebrating: demand for their product increased by an incredible 207 per cent within the space of a year. Put simply, people are queuing up to move in.

In 2007 there were 6,493 of them. A year later that number had jumped to 19,912 - comparable to the average home gate for the city's football team. Not bad for 12 months' work. In fact, over the year, it means that 37 more people a day decided they would like a social home in Coventry.

Steve Rudge, the council's head of housing and policy services, admits that when the Government Office called to collect its figures 'they were surprised that they had gone up as much as they had'.

And the council was in for a further shock when it found out the 207 per cent increase in its waiting list was the biggest jump anywhere in England. It has since grown further to 22,214.

So why has social housing in Coventry become so popular?

Despite the undoubted impact of the recession the council thinks the jump can be explained largely by a single word - choice.

In 2007 the council - which transferred all its stock to Whitefriars Housing Association in 2000 - completely altered the way social housing was allocated in the city.

It dumped the old, largely paper-based system, in which housing was offered to applicants based on their need for housing.

In its place came a choice-based lettings system - in which applicants can view a weekly list of available social homes and bid for the ones that take

their fancy. The government wants all councils to adopt choice-based systems by 2010.

'We wanted a system that not only did CBL but also made it much easier for people to apply for accommodation,' Mr Rudge said.

Three bands

But the change has exceeded expectations and produced some surprising results.

People who sign up to the new system are divided into three main bands. Band 1 is for those with a 'very urgent' need of a home - there are currently 97 applicants who fall into this category. A further 1,773 applicants fall into band 2, for urgent cases. 'Everybody else' falls into band 3, which currently means 20,344 people.

With roughly 2,500 homes becoming available every year, you might expect the vast majority of homes to

go to the urgent and very urgent cases, with a few thousand left over for everyone else.

But because people are able to bid themselves - and are not reliant on the council making them an offer - that is not happening.

In fact, 45 per cent of all lettings are being snapped up by band 3 cases, 40 per cent by band 2 and 15 per cent by those in band 1.

People in band 3 are in a position to bid for homes that are either unpopular or may not meet the needs of people in bands 1 and 2. And their success is leading people who previously would not have thought about applying for a social home to sign up.

'We certainly never appreciated that most of the lettings each week would be band 3 cases,' Mr Rudge said. 'That is because of the nature of the vacancies. Most of them are flats. Most of the people with housing need will be families. Families bid for the

smallest amount of property advertised each week.'

Sandy Warwick, homefinder officer for the council, confirmed that people get the most out of the system by using their three bids a week. 'With 20,000 people waiting for 2,000 properties, you have to keep bidding to stand a chance.'

Another possible reason for the rise in demand is the fact that the council currently allocates 25 per cent of homes based solely on the amount of time someone has been on the waiting list, as opposed to their need for a home. Not all councils with CBL systems do this.

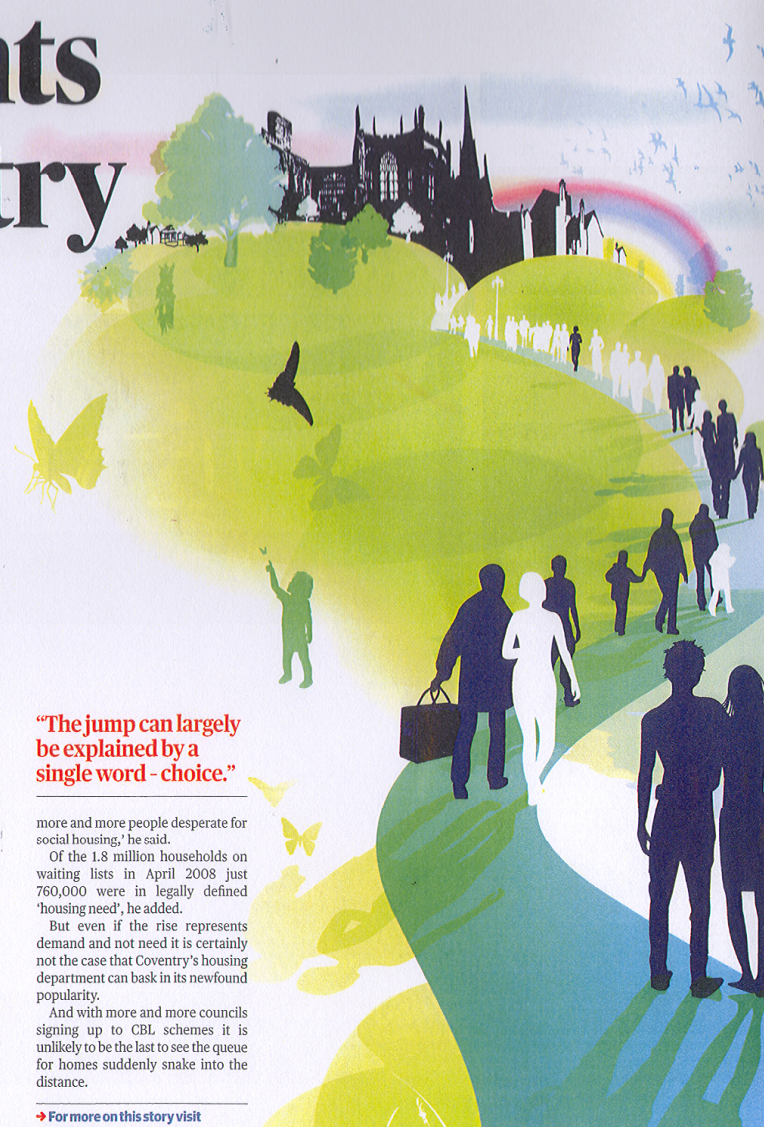
'We have found that there are an awful lot of people out there who say, "I might as well have an application out there because I might need it sometime",' Mr Rudge added.

Of course, there are other practical reasons behind the rise too - such as the impact of the recession and the fact that the new list drew together the council's waiting list and those of the housing associations that operate in the city.

Despite its massive jump in its waiting list, Coventry probably shouldn't fret too much. According to housing academic Hal Pawson, who has researched the impact of CBL across the nation, it is far from alone.

Between 2000 and 2004 waiting list numbers for councils adopting CBL rose by an average 79 per cent - compared with an increase of 40 per cent for other councils, he said.

But the rise meant people had to be increasingly careful about how they interpret waiting list figures, he added. 'The changes we have seen in the last few years aren't just about



“The jump can largely be explained by a single word - choice.”

more and more people desperate for social housing,' he said.

Of the 1.8 million households on waiting lists in April 2008 just 760,000 were in legally defined 'housing need', he added.

But even if the rise represents demand and not need it is certainly not the case that Coventry's housing department can bask in its newfound popularity.

And with more and more councils signing up to CBL schemes it is unlikely to be the last to see the queue for homes suddenly snake into the distance.

➔ For more on this story visit www.insidehousing.co.uk

Coventry's vital statistics

6,493

Number of people on the waiting list in 2007

19,912

Number of people on the waiting list in 2008

207%

Annual rise in demand for housing within the space of a year

22,214

Number of people now registered on the waiting list

97

Number of people registered and in very urgent need of housing

1,173

Number of people in urgent housing need

20,344

People on waiting list with no measurable housing need

250 to 270

Approximate number of weekly bids for homes in popular areas of the city

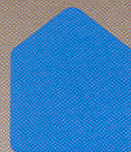
A Long And Winding Road!

- CBL Pilot site
- Parallel schemes
- Developed a city wide CBL scheme with all Housing Associations
- Draft CBL Code of Guidance
- Launch and 2008 review
- Conclusions

A Long And Winding Road!

- Final publication of CBL Code of Guidance
- Re-think of the Conclusions
- House of Lords decisions
- Re-think of the re-thought conclusions
- Final implementation
- “Fair and Flexible”

Your GUIDE to Coventry Homefinder



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Coventry Homefinder - Bands

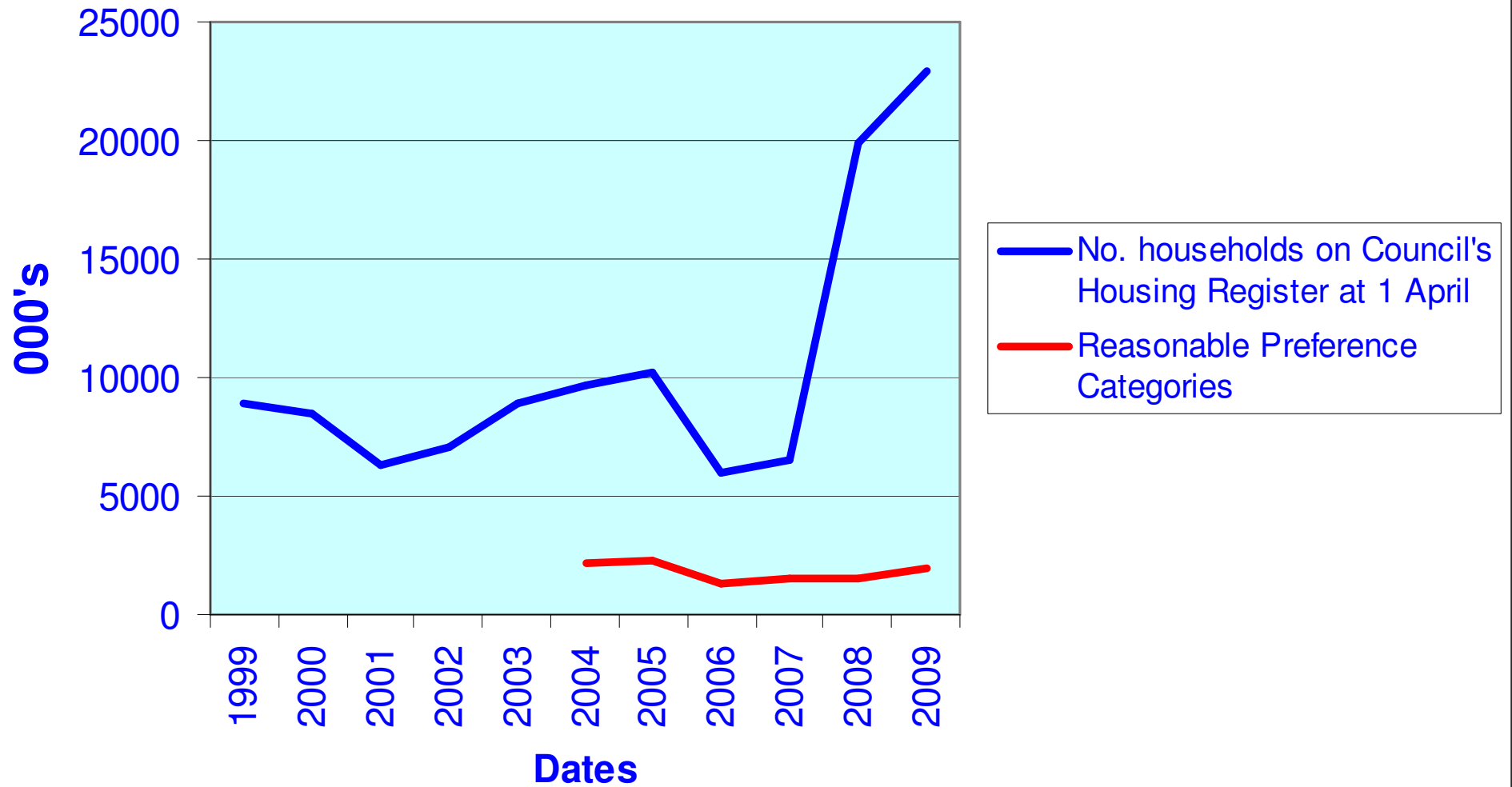
Applicants are given a banding based on their assessed level of housing need:

Band	Criteria	Examples
Band 1	Very Urgent Needs	Statutory Homeless
		Decants - to facilitate demolition or redevelopment
		Violence and harassment
		Severe overcrowding
		Severe medical issues
		Releasing specialist accommodation - for example disabled persons bungalows
		Two or more priorities in Band 2
Band 2	Urgent Needs	Medical issues
		Overcrowding
		Insanitary conditions
		Substantial under occupation - of 4 or 5 bed properties
		Social and welfare needs
		Homeless prevention
Band 3	All other Homefinders	All other Homefinders

75% of properties prioritised by banding

25% of properties prioritised by registration
date alone

Summary of Housing Register figures



22 January 2010

Band 1	95
Band 2	2,186
Band 3	<u>22,975</u>
	<u>25,256</u>

49% of those registered have never made a bid.

Properties Let

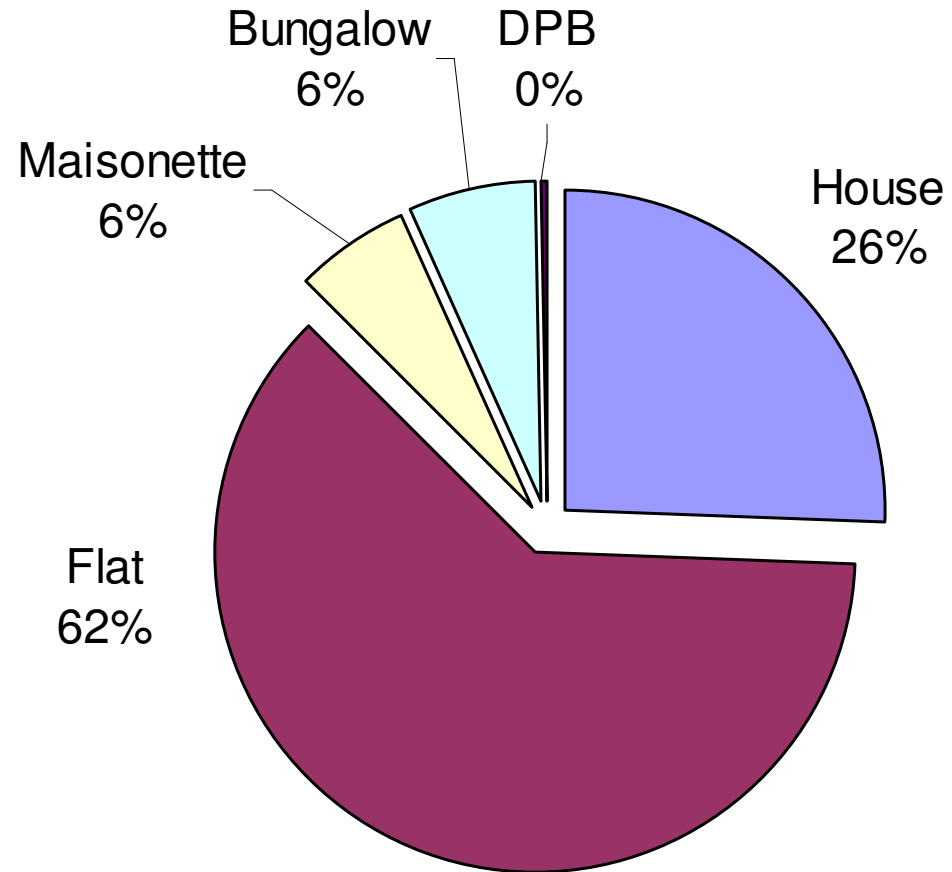
2424 properties were advertised on Coventry Homefinder during 2008-09 and successfully let.



Property Types

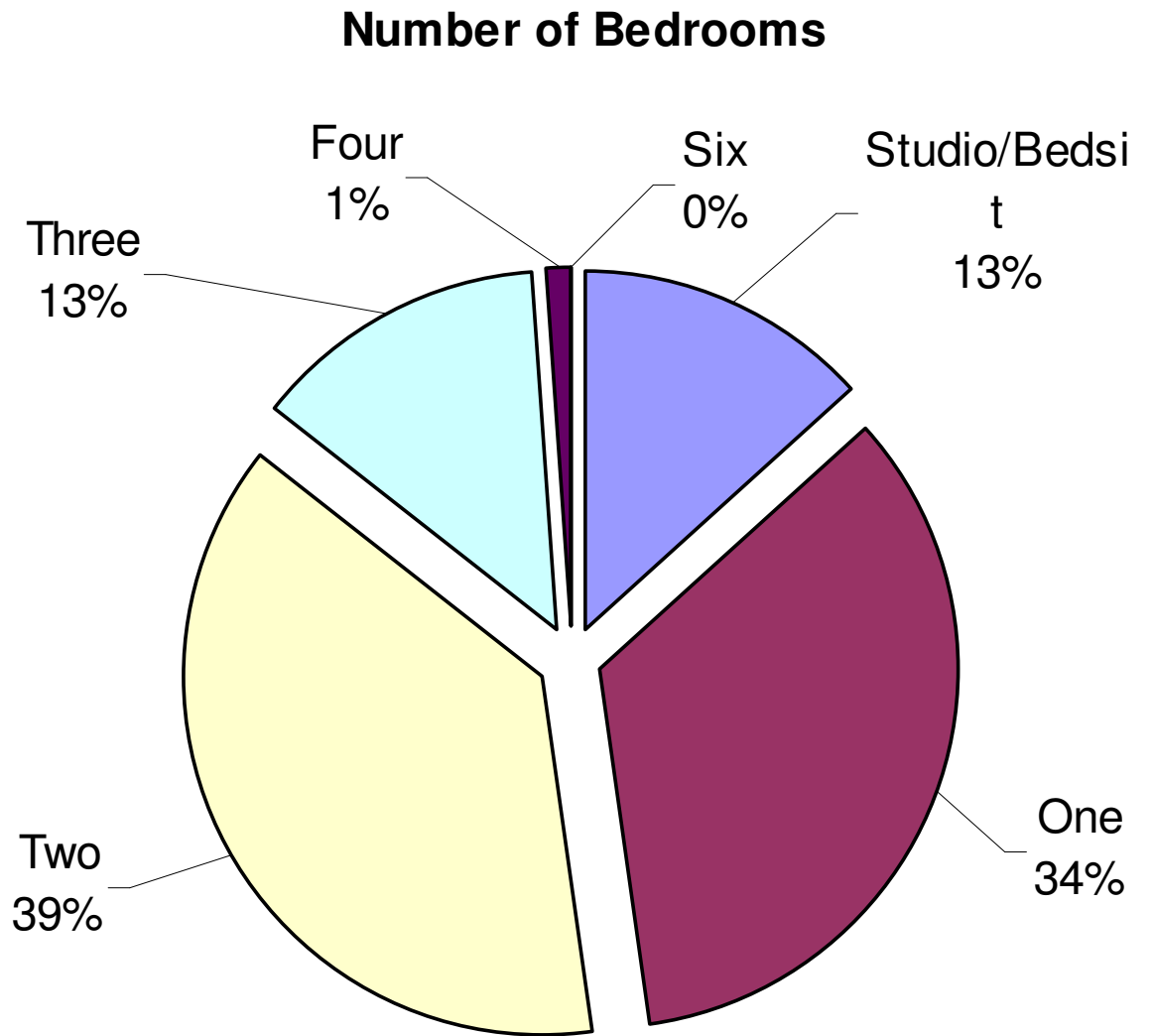
Property Type	Number	Percent
House	619	25.5%
Flat	1499	61.8%
Maisonette	145	6.0%
Bungalow	153	6.3%
DPB	8	0.3%
Total	2424	100.0%

Property Types



Number of Bedrooms

Number of Bedrooms	Number	Percent
Studio/Bedsit	323	13.33%
One	835	34.45%
Two	915	37.75%
Three	326	13.45%
Four	24	0.99%
Five	0	0.00%
Six	1	0.04%
Total	2424	100.00%



Location

The city is divided into 40 geographical areas for CBL. The 10 areas with the highest number of lettings in 2008-09 were:

Location	Number	Percent
Hillfields	221	9.12%
Willenhall	192	7.92%
Willenhall Wood	158	6.52%
Foleshill	144	5.94%
Tile Hill North	139	5.73%
Wood End	121	4.99%
Bell Green	117	4.83%
Canley	113	4.66%
Spon End	98	4.04%
Stoke Aldermoor	98	4.04%
Total for top ten	1401	57.80%
Overall Total	2424	100.00%

Location

In comparison, the 10 areas with the lowest number of letters in 2008-09 were:

Location	Number	Percent
Gosford Green	15	0.62%
Longford	15	0.62%
Binley	14	0.58%
Earlsdon	14	0.58%
Allesley	12	0.50%
Cannon Park	11	0.45%
Keresley	8	0.33%
Whitley	3	0.12%
Allesley Park	1	0.04%
Allesley Village	1	0.04%
Total for lowest ten	94	3.88%

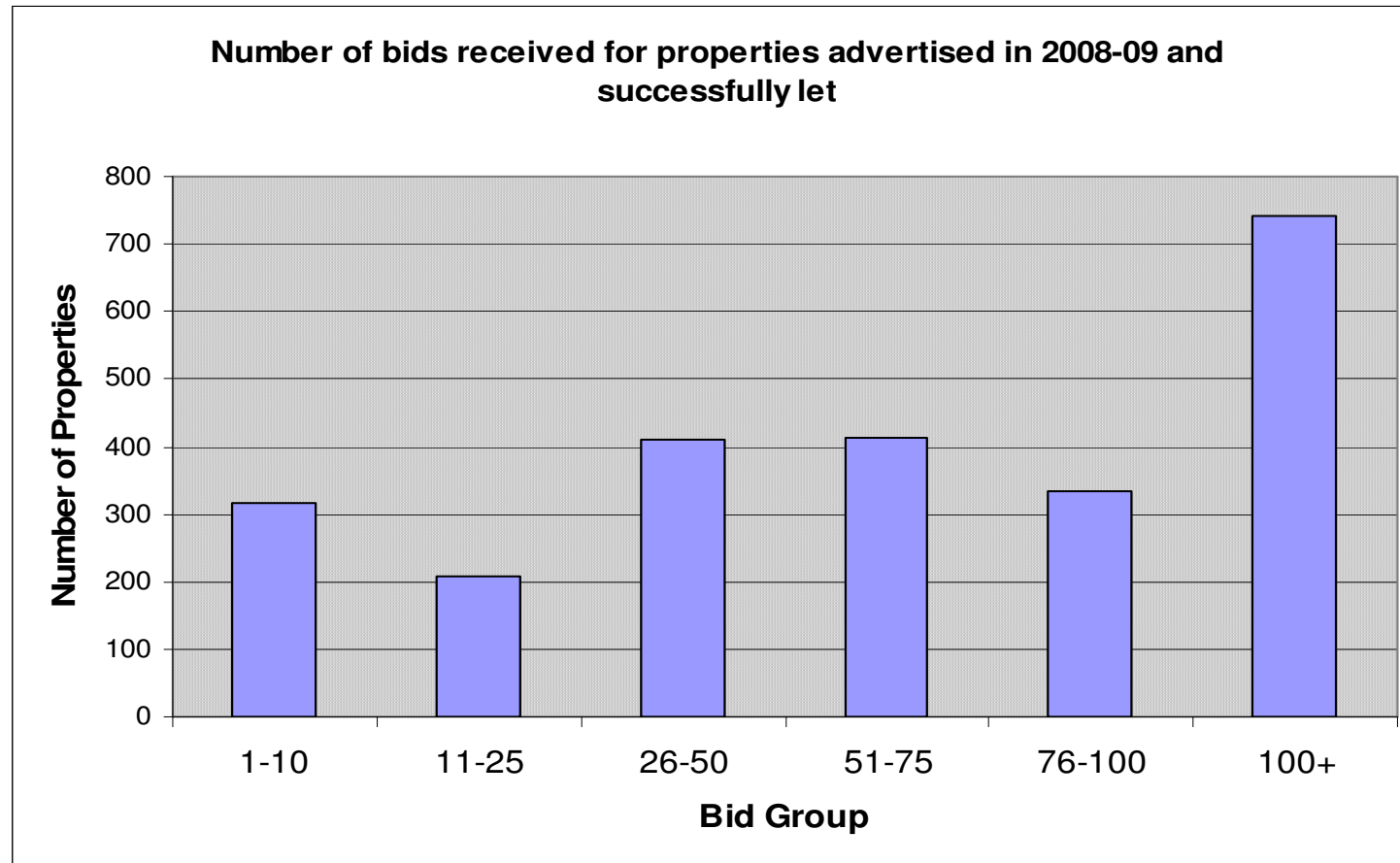
Bids Received

A total of 222,018 bids were made during 2008-09.

This gives an average of 92 bids for each property that was let.

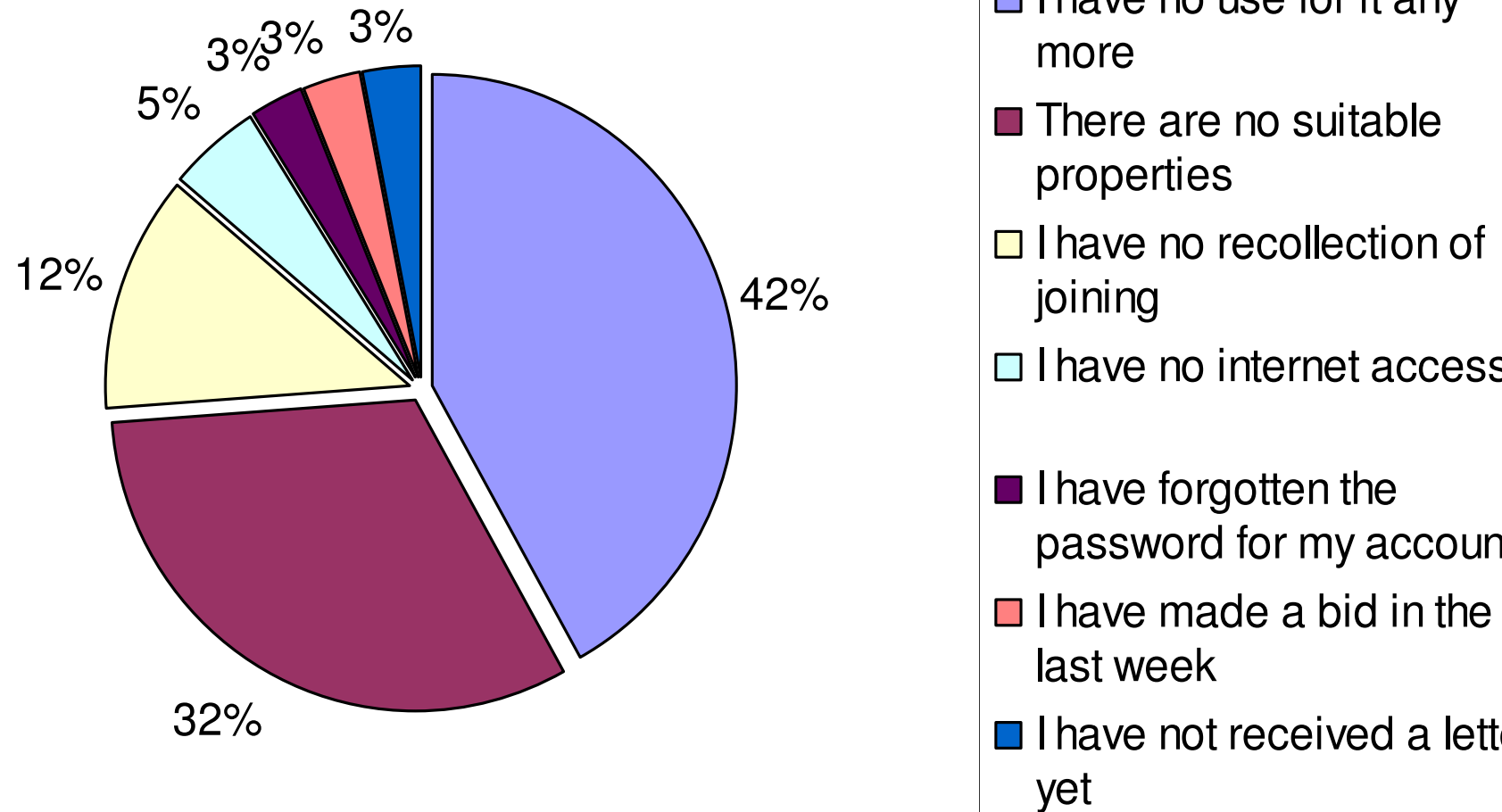
The highest number of bids was for a 3 bedroom house in Colbrook, which received 579 bids.

Number of Bids Received	Offers Accepted
1-10	317
11-25	208
26-50	409
51-75	413
76-100	335
100+	742
Total	2424



Survey of Non-Bidders in Priority Bands

100% of non-bidders in a priority band were surveyed during March 2009 to establish the reasons they had not placed a bid on Homefinder:



Comparison Of Register And Properties Available - Bedrooms

Minimum bedroom need (at 01-04-09) compared to total vacancies by bedroom for the year 2008-09:

Vacancies by bedroom		Requirement by minimum bedroom need			
Size	Number	Band 1	Band 2	Band 1+2	Band 3
Studio	323	20	575	595	10179
One	835	5	111	116	1714
Two	915	36	553	589	6335
Three	326	25	396	421	2436
Four or more	25	20	164	184	366

Ethnic Origin of Main Applicant

Ethnic Origin of main applicant	Band 1		Band 2		Band 3		Total Register		Population
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Asian British - Bangladeshi	2	1.9%	16	0.9%	98	0.5%	116	0.5%	
Asian British - Indian	4	3.8%	49	2.7%	401	1.9%	454	2.0%	
Asian British - Pakistani	2	1.9%	46	2.6%	285	1.4%	333	1.5%	
Asian British - Other	3	2.8%	23	1.3%	213	1.0%	239	1.0%	
Black British - African	12	11.3%	150	8.3%	1802	8.6%	1964	8.6%	
Black British - Caribbean	2	1.9%	27	1.5%	491	2.3%	520	2.3%	
Black British - Other	1	0.9%	11	0.6%	226	1.1%	238	1.0%	
Chinese	1	0.9%	2	0.1%	24	0.1%	27	0.1%	
White and Asian	1	0.9%	17	0.9%	150	0.7%	168	0.7%	
White and Black African	2	1.9%	19	1.1%	189	0.9%	210	0.9%	
White and Black Caribbean	1	0.9%	18	1.0%	355	1.7%	374	1.6%	
White and Other	0	0.0%	7	0.4%	127	0.6%	134	0.6%	
White British	57	53.8%	1081	60.1%	13370	63.6%	14508	63.3%	
White Irish	2	1.9%	28	1.6%	306	1.5%	336	1.5%	
White Other	1	0.9%	55	3.1%	1121	5.3%	1177	5.1%	
White and Other	4	3.8%	75	4.2%	706	3.4%	785	3.4%	
White and Other	11	10.4%	175	9.7%	1166	5.5%	1352	5.9%	
Total	106	100.0%	1799	100.0%	21030	100.0%	22935	100.0%	

Is it a common allocation scheme or a scheme whereby people are nominated by the Council, to the Associations?

Other “intriguing” issues

- Homelessness
- Age of registration
- Properties purpose built/adapted for those with mobility problems
- Owner Occupiers
- Bedrooms/Permitted number of people
- Checking at registration
- “Band chasing”
- Reviews and complaints

Other “intriguing” issues

- Limitation of bids
- “Serial bidders”
- Contacting successful bidders
- Ready for Letting/letting times
- Simplicity

Coventry Homefinder – Proposed Revised Bands

Band	Sub-Banding	Criteria
Band 1	Band 1a	Exceptional medical need.
		Severe overcrowding (two or more bedrooms lacking).
		Tenants of partner HAs needing to be 'decanted' to enable a redevelopment scheme to proceed.
		Statutory Homeless cases (one bidding round only).
	Band 1b	Tenants of partner HAs moving to release specialist disabled person's accommodation.
		Tenants of partner HAs moving because their own home is 'under-occupied' by two or more bedrooms.
		People fleeing racial harassment, hate crime or domestic violence that have to be rehoused.
		People with an urgent medical need who are also overcrowded (one bedroom lacking).

Coventry Homefinder – Proposed Revised Bands

Band	Sub-Banding	Criteria
Band 2	Band 2a	Urgent medical need or social/welfare issues.
		Overcrowding (one bedroom lacking).
		Children who have been 'looked after' by the Local Authority and are moving to independent living.
		People living in unsanitary conditions.
	Band 2b	Homeless prevention, where the person has been accommodated in private rented accommodation and the landlord is not renewing the tenancy agreement.
		Tenants of partner HAs living in a house and moving because their home is under-occupied by one bedroom.
		People living in short-stay hostel accommodation.
		Non-urgent medical need.
		Band 1 cases reviewed and banding reduced.
	Band 2c	Non statutory homeless applicants; statutory homeless applicants who are 'intentionally homeless' and statutory homeless applicants where the duty has been discharged but the household has not accepted a qualifying offer of accommodation.

Coventry Homefinder – Proposed Revised Bands

Band	Sub-Banding	Criteria
Band 3	Band 3a	People with no housing need recognised in Bands 1 and 2, but who have a local connection with Coventry
		People with a housing need identified in Bands 1 and 2, but who have no local connection with Coventry
	Band 3b	People with no housing need recognised in Bands 1 and 2, and with no local connection to Coventry
		Owner-occupiers

Mobility

- Local need v. national mobility
- Cross boundary working

Making better use of the housing stock: dealing with under-occupation and vacation of specialist housing

Supporting people in work/seeking work

Target allocations to various groups



Vulnerable applicants

- CBL team
- Role of supporters, advisors, agencies
- Short-stay hostels

Next steps

- Regional working
- Charging
- Private sector properties

What's good?

- An accessible system
- A single point of entry for social housing
- All stock owning associations are part of Coventry Homefinder
- Most transactions being done electronically
- Properties are being let
- Still relatively simple

What's not so good?

- Ease of joining means that we can't check every application
- Still unease about role of 'support agencies'
- Differences between whom the Local Authority has to allow on the system and whom Associations have to house
- Differing size "rules"
- Reviews and complaints
- Importance of improving banding
- Contact difficulties, have been emphasised
- No additional properties produced (obviously!)

“By revising their allocation policies in the light of this new guidance, councils will be able to make full use of the available freedoms to meet the specific needs of their communities”