

Homefinder Somerset Common Allocations Policy 2013 Consultation Feedback

1. Introduction

1.1 Changes to the Homefinder Somerset common allocation policy have been previously discussed and agreed by the following officer groups:

- Homefinder Somerset Operational Group
- Homefinder Somerset CBL Working Group
- Homefinder Somerset Monitoring Board
- Somerset Strategic Housing Officers Group

1.2 Following this we summarised the main changes to the policy for both applicants and other key stakeholders and set up two online surveys to capture consultation feedback on the proposed changes. Local authorities in some cases also sent the link to the survey to all applicants on the register that had an email address. All registered provider partners were contacted as well as other key stakeholders in local government, the health service and third sector.

1.3 The surveys were available for use from 2nd April 2013 to May 24th 2013.

2. Summary of Respondent Feedback

The key findings from each of the surveys are set out below.

2.1 *Applicant Consultation Survey - Page 2 to 25 (section 3)*

113 applicants responded to the survey with most respondents coming from Taunton Deane and South Somerset areas.

In general respondents agreed or strongly agreed with all of the changes we are proposing to make. There were some negative comments regarding the changes proposed to shared facilities (under and over 35s), the proposed change to the bedroom size calculation, additional priority for armed forces personnel and the changes to harassment in gold and emergency banding.

2.2 *Stakeholder Consultation Survey - Page 26 to 44 (section 4)*

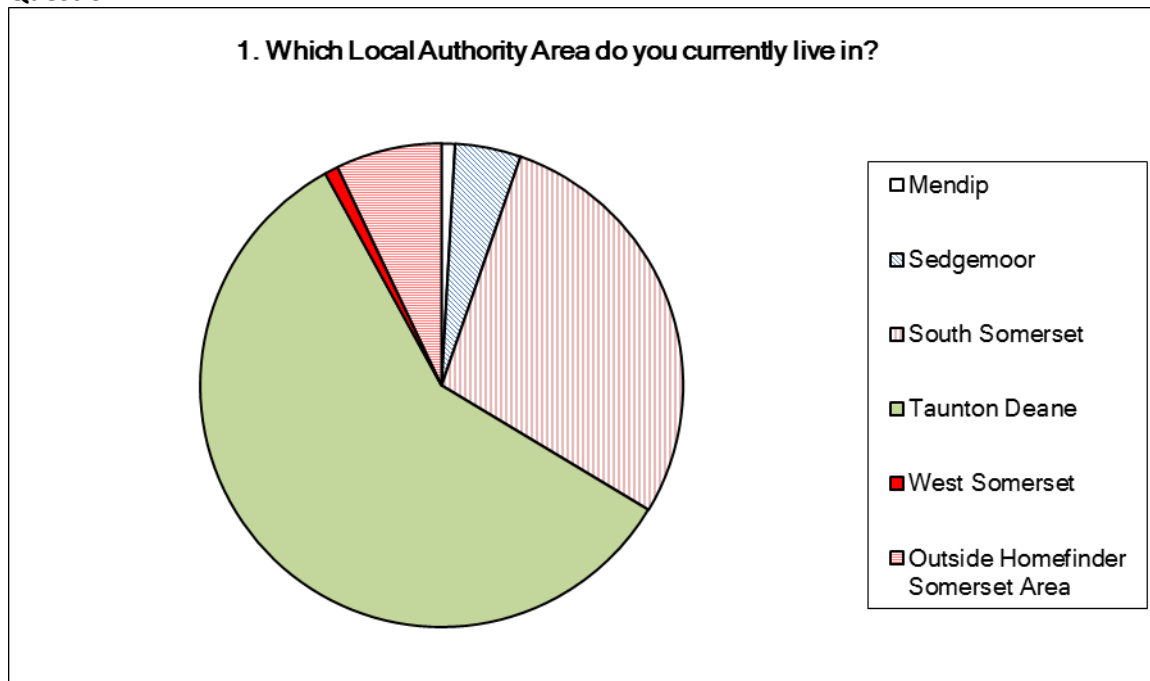
37 stakeholders responded to the survey, with just over 70% being responses from local authority staff. 9 landlords responded with their views. One of the largest landlords did not respond to the consultation.

In general respondents agreed or strongly agreed with all of the changes we are proposing to make. There were some negative comments regarding the changes proposed to shared facilities (under and over 35s) and the changes to harassment in gold and emergency banding and some interesting general comments that the partnership may wish to consider. There was also disagreement from stakeholders on the proposed changes to give additional time credit to armed forces personnel.

3. Detailed Feedback on Applicant Consultation Survey

3.1 Set out below is the detailed feedback from respondents against each of the survey questions

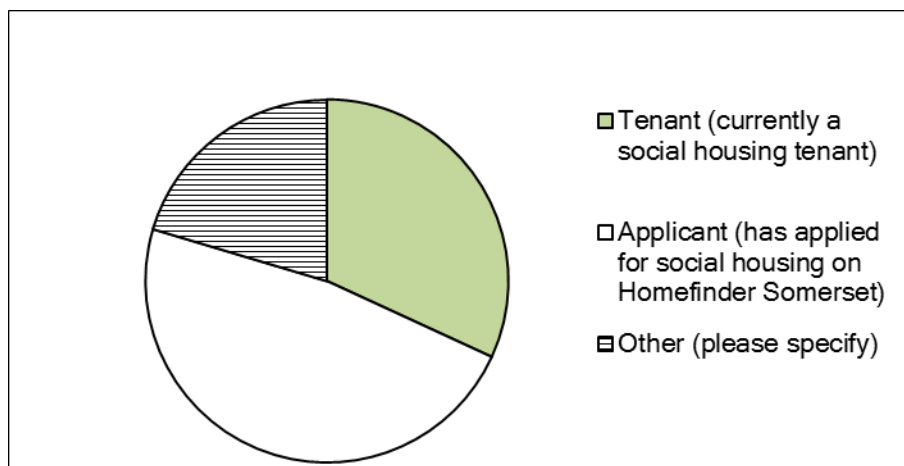
Question 1



Question 2

2. Please indicate whether you are a Tenant, Applicant or Other

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Tenant (currently a social housing tenant)	31.9%	36
Applicant (has applied for social housing on Homefinder Somerset)	47.8%	54
Other (please specify)	20.4%	23
<i>answered question</i>		113
<i>skipped question</i>		0

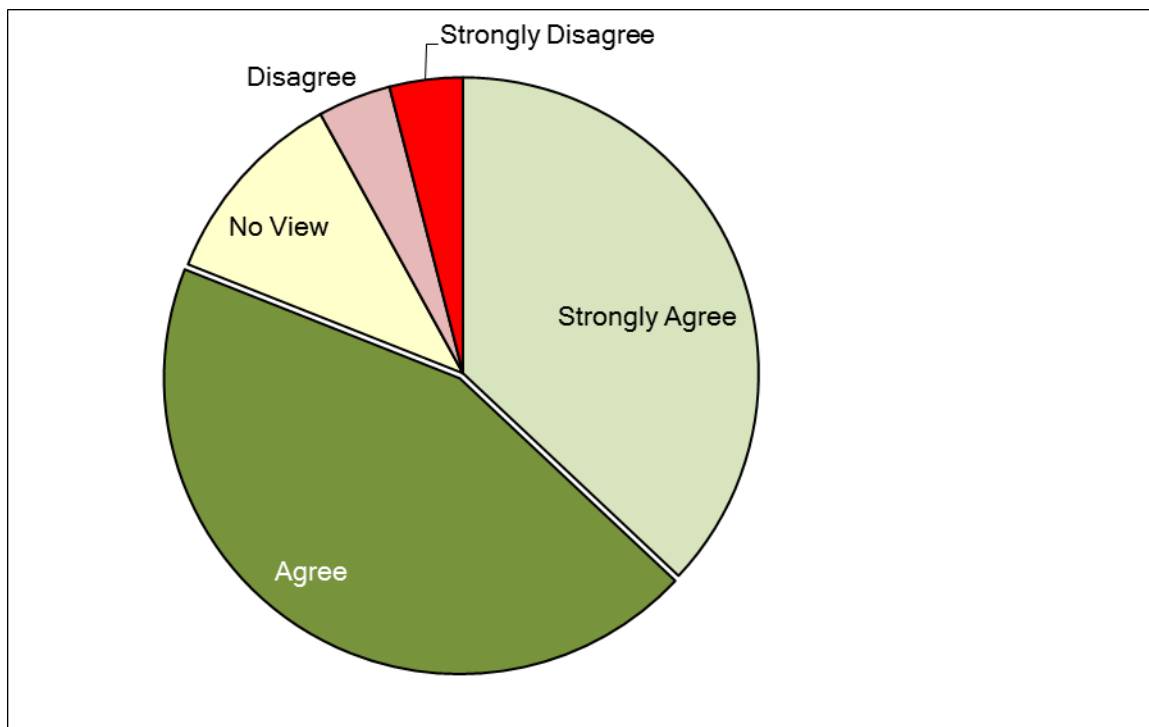


For those that answered other – here are the responses:

1	homeowner
2	Occupational Therapist for Housing
3	family member of applicant on Homefinder Somerset
4	Home owner
5	Carer
6	Tenant private
7	Council tax payer
8	employee
9	councillor
10	Landlord
11	member of the public
12	District Councillor
13	homeowner looking for pension housing
14	looking for social housing due to medical need
15	council tenant
16	PRIVATE RENTED PROPERTY
17	home owner
18	I am both a tenant & on the homefinder site as an applicant.
19	SSDC employee
20	District Councillor
21	SSDC District Councillor
22	employee
23	Commissioner

Question 3

3. We currently consider a household's income and savings to see if they can afford other housing. We will now also include any property and land owned by anyone in the household. Do you agree? (See Section 6.2 - 6.10 of the policy - Applicants Financial Resources)		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	37.0%	37
Agree	44.0%	44
No View	11.0%	11
Disagree	4.0%	4
Strongly Disagree	4.0%	4
If you disagree please tell us why		7
	<i>answered question</i>	100
	<i>skipped question</i>	13



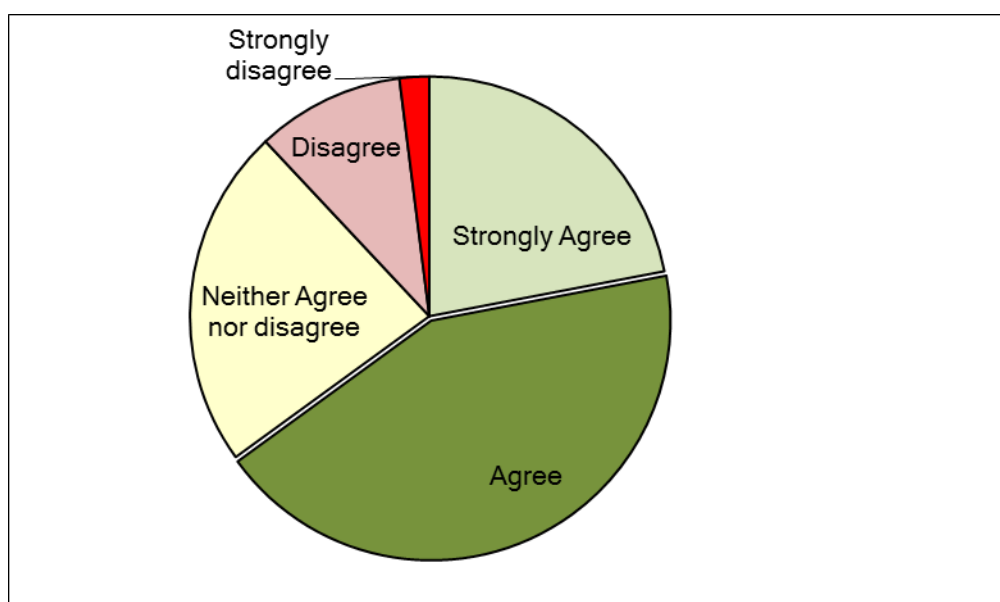
Those that respondents that disagreed commented as follows:

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
1	There are people who are on low income deserve to have a house
2	it should not be means tested.
3	Because you are discriminating against individuals and not considering all facts
4	I feel that it should be the main applicants that are applying that should declare income etc. And if they get an income from other properties etc
5	somebody else's income/assets is completely irrelevant to the person in need of a home unless they are moving with them.
6	<p>So someone who works full time and has done for the past 32yrs but is paid £6000 per annum below the average wage ie take home pay about £1200 per month can afford to pay the average £500 per month private rent! , Take into account (WHICH YOU WON'T) other house hold bills and petrol for 20 miles per day travel to work and back, and your left with very little, any savings will be for a deposit and first months rent for when you have to leave your current rented property,.</p> <p>Yet people who never work and have no intention of working get given property, of which the state pays for in benefits.</p> <p>Oh to be an MP and have a second home subsidised and all the benefits of claiming travel and food expenses.</p>
7	It really pays to work, This is such a fair system!!!!
7	It depends on who the other person in the household is. If it is a partner then it maybe justified to do this. If not, then it may not be reasonable to include.

Question 4

To make best use of social housing stock and help social housing tenants who want to move to smaller properties we will not apply the financial test to some applicants. This may mean someone could change band to enable them to move more quickly. Do you agree?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	22.0%	22
Agree	43.0%	43
Neither Agree nor disagree	23.0%	23
Disagree	10.0%	10
Strongly disagree	2.0%	2
If you disagree please tell us why		12
<i>answered question</i>		100
<i>skipped question</i>		13



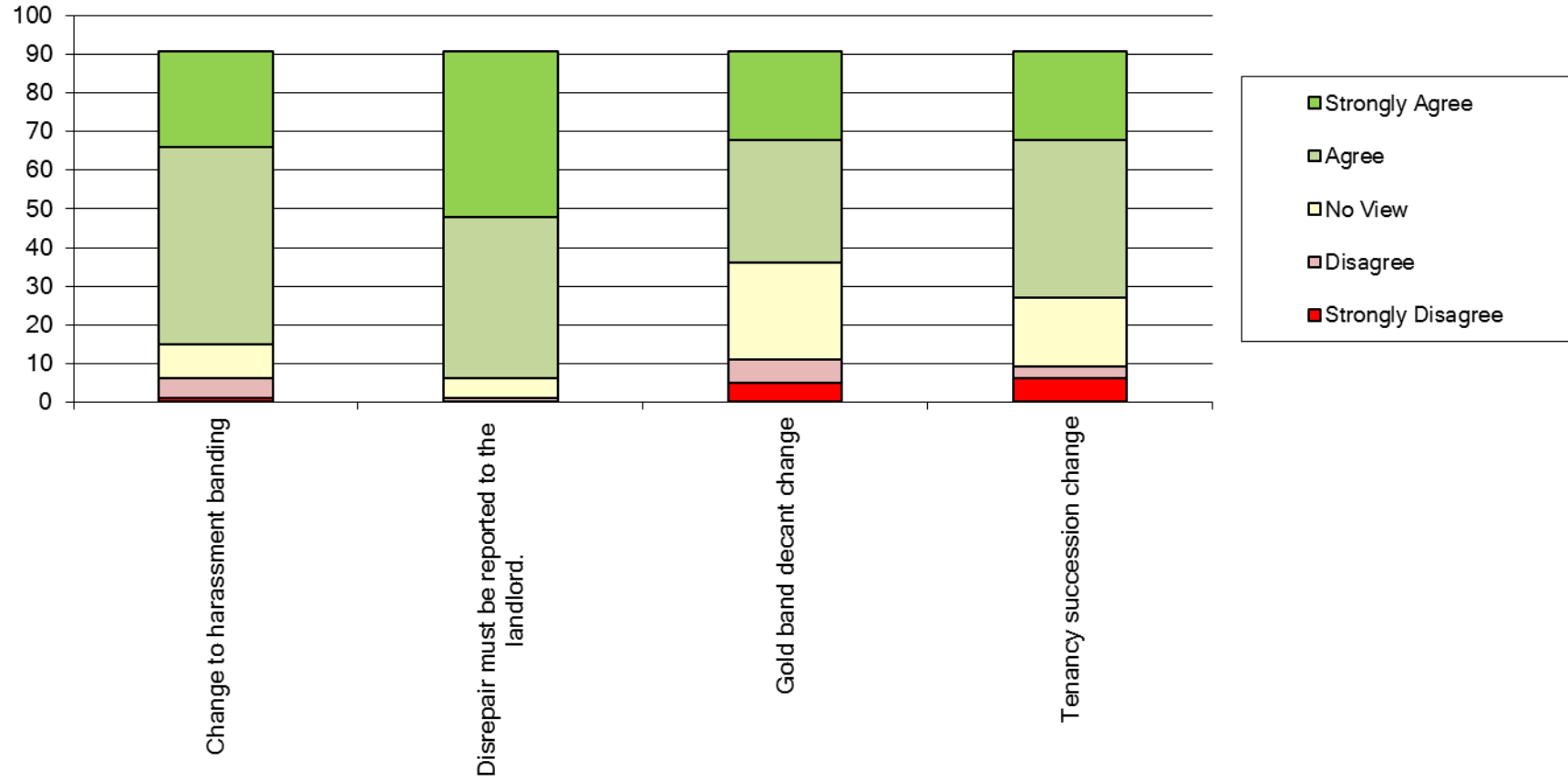
Those respondents that disagreed commented as follows:

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
1	I believe it should remain equal on both parts.
2	Whilst understanding the background reason, if means testing is to be used it should be used for ALL applications.
3	Some of those attending disagreed as they felt that income should be considered in the same way as in Q3. Other comments from those attending were that they felt that this change could be a strong incentive to encourage tenants to downsize.
4	Again you are discriminating
5	I dont really understand this question/statement...
6	Because I have been waiting about 8 years for somewhere and they get to move into a smaller property when they could be better off than I am.
7	If a 'means test' is applied this should be applied across the board to prevent unfairness.
8	If they are not in genuine need they should not be in social housing
9	they might still be able to afford to buy their own
10	I think you should do the same test to everyone to make it fair
11	If they have land and buildings this should still be taken into account.
12	Does it really matter

Question 5

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the proposed changes to the Gold Band assessment criteria set out below.						
Answer Options	Strongly Agree	Agree	No View	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Response Count
We will change the policy to state that applicants who are victims of harassment or violence must express an interest in properties that are away from the source of the harassment/violence. The banding will be time limited and subject to a three monthly review. Do you agree? See (6.12.4 Harassment)	25	51	9	5	1	91
As a requirement of Environmental Health legislation we will add a statement to the existing banding criteria that all cases of disrepair must be reported to the landlord. (See section 6.12.6 Under Occupation)	43	42	5	1	0	91
Gold banding will only apply to decants' within Somerset where the landlord is a partner of Homefinder Somerset. (A decant is where a social housing tenant needs to move from their current property to allow repairs and maintenance to be carried out.) (See section 6.12.11 Decants)	23	32	25	6	5	91
Where applicants are left in a social housing property with no legal right to remain, after nine months we will place expressions of interest in other properties on their behalf. Do you agree? (See section 6.12.12 Tenancy Succession)	23	41	18	3	6	91
If you disagree please say why						14
						<i>answered question</i> 92
						<i>skipped question</i> 21

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

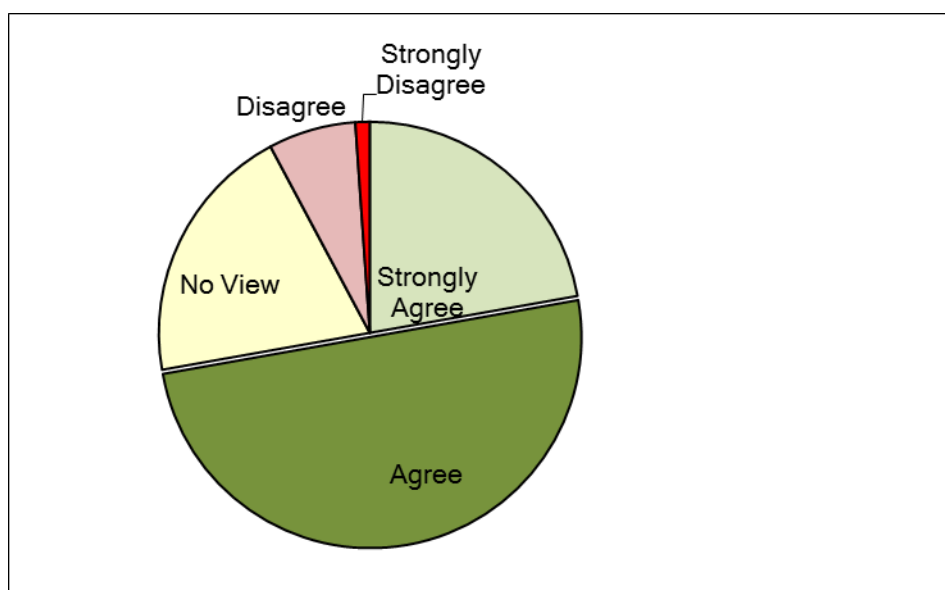


Of those respondents that disagreed these are the comments they made:

Number	If you disagree please say why
1	This could be open to abuse by Landlords trying to oust legitimate occupants.
2	housing shouldnt be in such disrepair for it to be funded by housing associations in the 1st place.
3	If they have no legal right to remain, why wait nine months? they are in a property that is of benefit to another applicant
4	Not just about legal right to remain, should also take account of their vulnerability
5	One tenant felt that to expect a household to bid outside the area could cause more disruption to the household, particularly with children who are settled in school.
6	1.why is it the victim always has to move away? 2.plain english please. i read it as that you will be the parents of an applicant and take their decision away from them.
7	victims of violence may need local friends or family for support and it seems unfair to penalise the victim by insisting they move away. I don't understand the questioin about decants. I don't see why applicants with no legal right to remain should be given special treatment. They have had 9 months notice.
8	I don't understand the statement.. or what it involves
9	It should apply whoever the landlord is
10	There could be reasons why someone needs to stay in the area, I.E; disabled persons who need family support and the LOW stock in their area resulting in council deciding to bid on properties away from support/family/friends!
11	i do not think it is fair to force someone into a property they find unsuitable when the reason they have to move is of no fault of their own and believe it is the person responsible for the harassment/violence's duty to move instead. on the second statement it would entirely depend on what grounds the tennant had no legal right to remain in the property however i believe everybody has a right to choose where they live
12	Are you serious!, someone in a property who has no legal right to be there and you want to fall over yourselves to find them another property.
13	timescale should be alot shorter
14	People experiencing violence and/or harassment are often in very complex situations, and a 3 month time limit may put vulnerable people under further unnecessary pressure. DECANTS - where people live close to a border (e.g. with BANES, Wiltshire, North Somerset, etc), then some flexibility would be sensible.

Question 6

Currently when a relationship breaks down and applicants wish to live separately they are placed in silver band. We will remove this criteria because applicants can still apply under one of the other existing categories. Do you agree?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	22.2%	20
Agree	50.0%	45
No View	20.0%	18
Disagree	6.7%	6
Strongly Disagree	1.1%	1
If you disagree please say why		5
<i>answered question</i>		90
<i>skipped question</i>		23

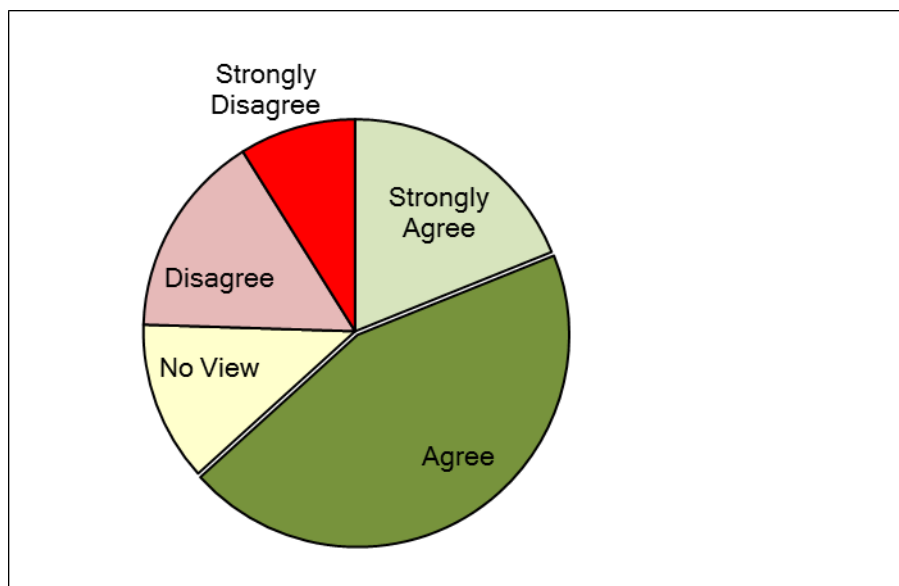


Those respondents that didn't agree gave the following comments:

Number	If you disagree please say why
1	What was the original reason for this category to be in place? What has changed that suggests that it needs to be removed?
2	The "other category" is sharing facilities which will no longer apply to under 35s. Under 35 couples who wish to separate will be in Bronze.
3	I disagree because most ADULTS CAN NOT AFFORD TO LIVE ALONE DUE TO RISING PRIVATE RENTAL COSTS SO THEREFORE WHEN A RELATIONSHIP BREAKS DOWN THEY ARE EFFECTIVELY BEING MADE HOMELESS AND SHOULD STILL BE ENTITLED TO SOCIAL HOUSING IF THEIR FINANCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES HAVE NOT CHANGED.
4	Just doesn't seem right that one person could potentially lose their home because a relationship has broken down
5	Cases of domestic abuse which are not "high risk" or where the victim doesn't actually want to disclose, could be within the "relationship breakdown" category. Efforts should be put in place to ensure that abuse victims are not disadvantaged.

Question 7

Currently when applicants are living in a shared property they are placed in silver band because they are sharing facilities. In line with changes made to the Housing Benefit regulations we will introduce an age restriction so this criteria applies to applicants over 35 only. Do you agree?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	18.9%	17
Agree	44.4%	40
No View	12.2%	11
Disagree	15.6%	14
Strongly Disagree	8.9%	8
If you disagree please tell us why		20
		<i>answered question</i>
		90
		<i>skipped question</i>
		23



The respondents that disagreed with the proposals commented as follows:

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
1	because mainly 20 +
2	because no one can afford the additional payments especially if waiting for benefits to be sorted.
3	Under 35's also require housing in their own right, this age limit may force young people to remain with their parents, which is a financial and well as social burden to all concerned.
4	should be for all ages not over 35's. Should be one band for all ages.
5	Age discrimination is not acceptable
6	We don't think it is fair to treat people differently just because of their age.
7	I can't see a logic to why age 35 plus makes a difference
8	you really don't want to help younger people to live independent from parents? you really want to force parents to house their "child" aged 25+?
9	Age discrimination as there is nothing that a 35 year old needs from their housing that a 34 year old does not. What is the ethical argument for all under 35 year olds being adequately housed in sharing? If an individual works and is under 35 the policy will state that that have no right for independant accomodation.
9	We will be discriminating against applicants that live and work in the homefinder somerset

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
	<p>area, for example if an under 35 year old lives outside the area in a HMO they would be awarded Silver. If they are under 35 in a HMO and working and living within homefinder they would be Bronze. We are actively discouraging housing local people.</p> <p>If an applicant is under 35 and pregnant living in a HMO she would be banded as Bronze until the child is born, basically enforcing that she would have to return to the HMO after birth and then present as homeless.</p> <p>We will dramatically increase the amount of homeless applications.</p>
10	Can't understand why you have chosen that age? should apply to adults 21 and over
11	applicants should be placed in lowest band - they chose to share. Possibly with a view to increasing their banding.
12	Why 35?
13	the age should be lower, we seem to forget our younger element in the housing structure.
14	what difference does age make
15	My understanding of the age restrictions, which I already see as unfair are that under 35 year olds have to share or have restrictions on benefits. Why penalise them further?
16	Age discrimination
17	That's against their human right
18	i do not understand why age makes a difference in this circumstance
19	I think it should be younger say 25.
20	Because this would have directly affected my ability to move out from my mothers property with my daughter as I was only 30 at that time. Why 35?

Question 8

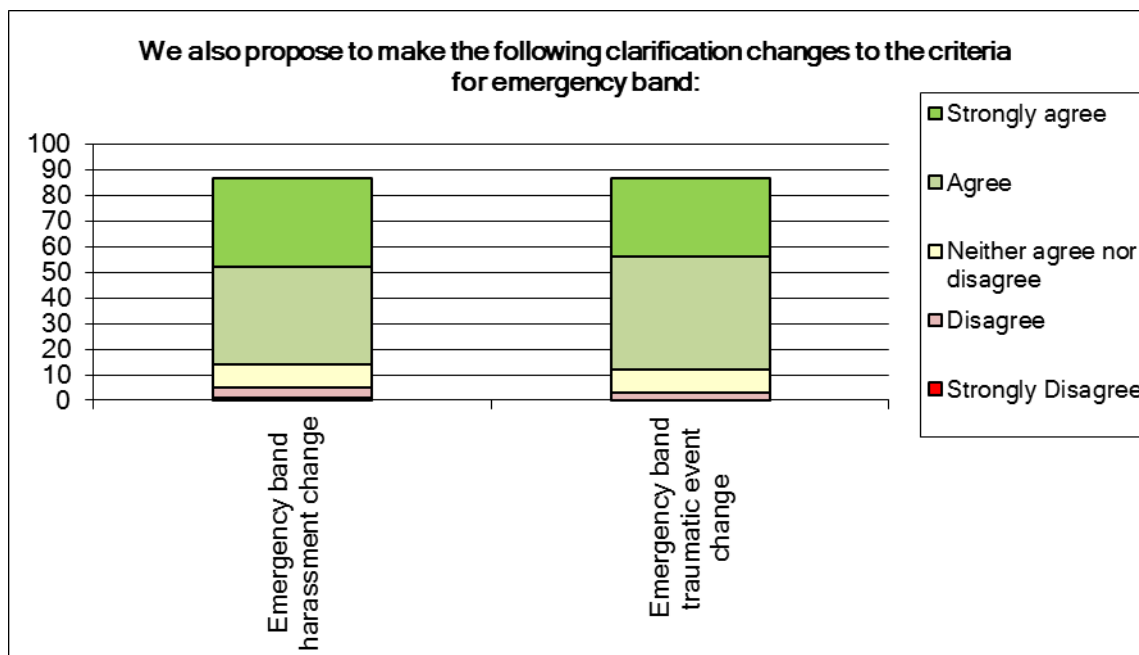
Within the current policy there are a number of reasons why an applicant may be in bronze band. To make it clearer for applicants we will include additional information as to why they have been placed in bronze band. Do you agree with this change?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	41.1%	37
Agree	51.1%	46
No View	5.6%	5
Disagree	1.1%	1
Strongly Disagree	1.1%	1
If you disagree please tell us why		1
<i>answered question</i>		90
<i>skipped question</i>		23

Those respondents that disagreed made the following comments:

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
1	Surely, reasons for any banding need to be clear and transparent, not just bronze band

Question 9

We also propose to make the following clarification changes to the criteria for emergency band:						
Answer Options	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Response Count
Emergency banding is currently awarded in cases of extreme harassment. The revised policy requires that any expression of interest must be away from the area where the harassment/violence occurred.(see Policy section 7.1c) - We wish to add further wording to make clear that we would expect any expression of interest to be away from the area where the harassment/violence issues are occurring.	35	38	9	4	1	87
Emergency banding is currently awarded when a sudden traumatic event has occurred. The revised policy states that the sudden traumatic event must be linked to the applicant's home and its surrounding area and continuing to live in the property will cause considerable distress.	31	44	9	3	0	87
If you disagree please tell us why						5
						<i>answered question</i> 89
						<i>skipped question</i> 24



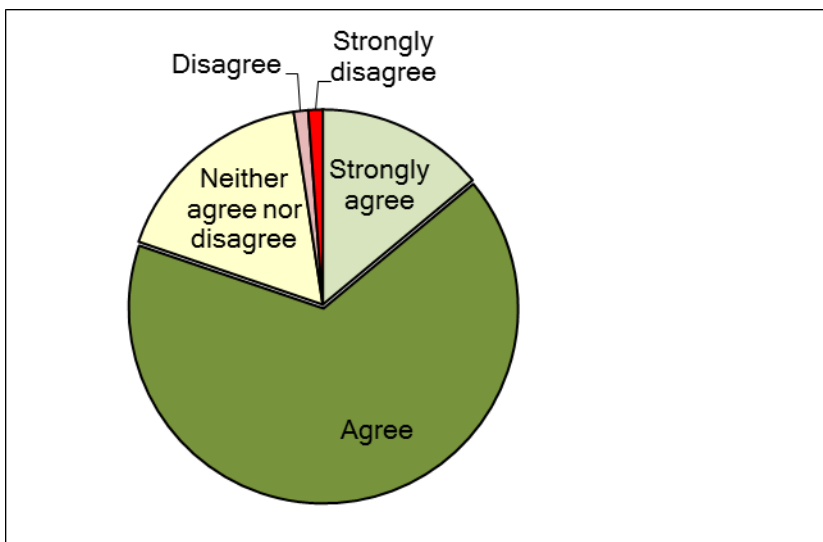
Those respondents that disagree made the following comments:

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
1	Emergency cases should be decided on the particular circumstances, and safety should come first always.
2	again you are victimising a victim further. if my neighbour harrasses me, he is in the wrong, not i.
3	Why should a victim be penalised or chased away from their local area where they may also be nearer to friends and family? I can see that in a lot of cases it may be the applicants wish to move away but I do not see they should be forced to do so if they have good reason to want to stay
4	Surely there could be traumatic events that are not connected to the actual home, but make it necessary to move from the neighbourhood or is that what you mean by surrounding area?..
5	Although this generally makes sense. Where vulnerable people are experiencing harassment and violence, it may not be reasonable to stipulate this. There should be some flexibility and judgement (by a senior manager?) to ensure that the victim is not disadvantaged. Re traumatic events. This generally makes sense -BUT there maybe instances where this would be unreasonable. There should be some flexibility to avoid disadvantaging someone who maybe vulnerable as a result of the traumatic event.

Question 10

Applicants can find the terms application/registration date/effective date confusing. Definitions have now been added to the policy to make the terms clearer: Registration/Application Date is the date the application is treated as being received. The Effective date is the date the applicant was placed in their current band. Do you agree these definitions make it clear?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly agree	14.0%	12
Agree	66.3%	57
Neither agree nor disagree	17.4%	15
Disagree	1.2%	1
Strongly disagree	1.2%	1
If you disagree please tell us why		2
<i>answered question</i>		86
<i>skipped question</i>		27



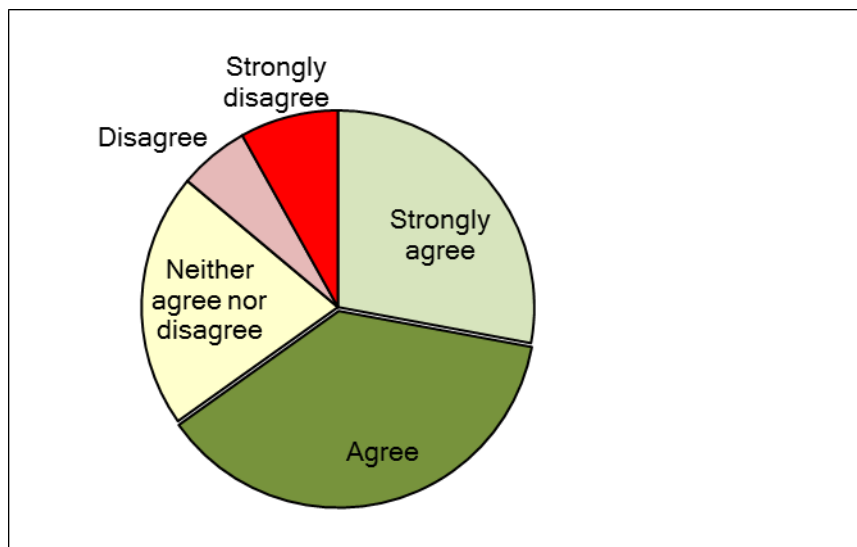
Those respondents that disagreed commented as follows:

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
1	but still long winded.
2	if the change is due to an administration error not caused by the applicant it should be backdated to the error date.

Question 11

The government requires the Local Authority to give some form of preference to Armed Forces personnel (past and present). We will give Armed Forces applicants an Effective date in band that will be backdated five years from the Application date. (The higher the band and the longer the time you have been in the band, the more likely you will be housed.) The following groups will qualify: (a) former members of the Armed Forces that have left the services in the last 5 years (b) serving members of the Armed Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service (c) bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving Services Family Accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner (d) serving or former members of the Reserve Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service Do you agree?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly agree	27.9%	24
Agree	37.2%	32
Neither agree nor disagree	20.9%	18
Disagree	5.8%	5
Strongly disagree	8.1%	7
If you disagree please tell us why		10
<i>answered question</i>		86
<i>skipped question</i>		27



That respondents that disagreed provided the following comments:

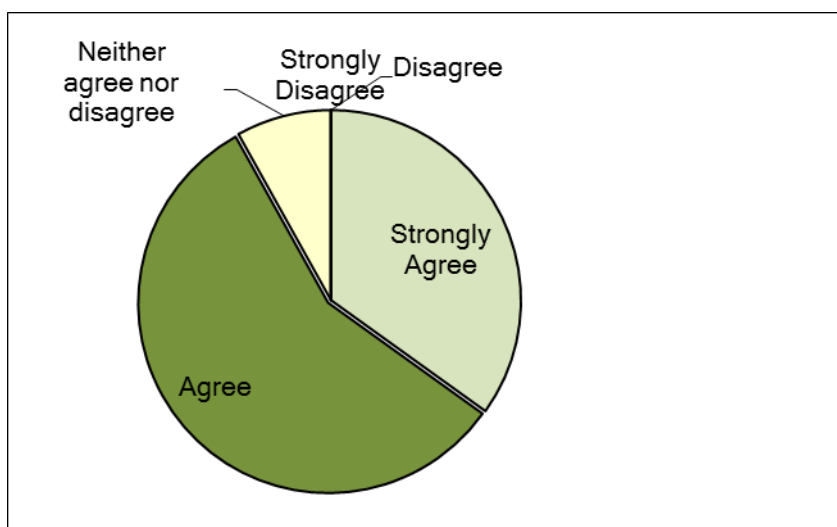
Number	If you disagree please tell us why
1	(a) Five years backdating is toom much, everyone should be treated in the same way. (b) 3 years would be acceptable although some strongly disagreed with the entire proposal. (c) 3 years would be acceptable although some strongly disagreed with the entire proposal. (d) 3 years would be acceptable although some strongly disagreed with the entire proposal. Some of the group flet very strongly that this issue should be addressed by central government and bot passed to Local Authorities.
2	they have had an income the same as everyone else why should they be put above a large family in overcrowded conditions
3	Because it discriminates with others
4	They chose to be in that job and should be treated like everyone else
5	No one is forced to join the armed forces and while they arfe within them they have housing

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
	educ and travel benefits. Once they leave, they should have to face the same realities as everyone else who has been struggling through the recession - unlike them.
6	Will this policy be applied to existing people on HFS that met the above at their registration/application date? If not this would be unfair on the existing HFS applicants
7	They should be treated as every one else they chose that job so what is the problem???
8	all applicants should be treated equally!
9	they have been doing a job just like everyone else.
10	Although I think anyone in the armed forces does an amazing job it feels unfair that because of a chosen profession you get preferential treatment. I think it should be a level playing field when applying for social housing and each case judged on its individual merits.

Question 12

To make it clearer the policy document now lists the change of circumstances that an applicant must report to the Local Authority. It is important for applicants to tell us about these changes as soon as possible as it may affect the banding. These changes of circumstances are:- • Change in household members • Change in medical condition of any household member • Changes/alterations to the condition of the property they live in • Changes in income of any household member • Changes in capital including the inheritance of any capital or property by any household member • The inclusion or exclusion of domestic pets • They no longer wish to remain on the housing register • Where a landlord has carried out improvements to remove previously identified hazards • Change of address Do you agree with these changes?

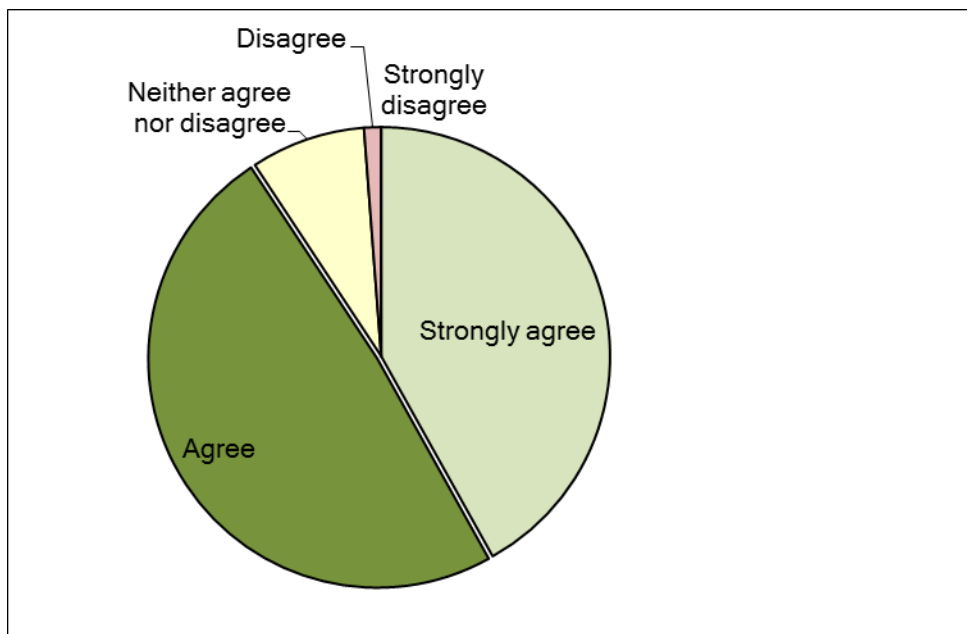
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	34.9%	30
Agree	57.0%	49
Neither agree nor disagree	8.1%	7
Disagree	0.0%	0
Strongly Disagree	0.0%	0
If you disagree please tell us why		0
<i>answered question</i>		86
<i>skipped question</i>		27



Question 13

The policy document now states what the consequences will be if the applicant makes false statements on their application form or in any written or verbal communication. Possible consequences are:- • Change in the banding • Ending the tenancy obtained through Homefinder Somerset • Court action which could result in a fine up to £5000 and/or a prison sentence Do you agree?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly agree	41.9%	36
Agree	48.8%	42
Neither agree nor disagree	8.1%	7
Disagree	1.2%	1
Strongly disagree	0.0%	0
If you disagree please tell us why		1
<i>answered question</i>		86
<i>skipped question</i>		27



Those respondents that disagreed provided the following comments:

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
1	I feel the punishments are a bit severe.

Question 14

The government is implementing changes to the way in which Housing Benefit is calculated regarding the number of bedrooms. because this will affect so many of the applicants for social housing we think it would be best to change the way we calculate the number of bedrooms that an applicant is entitled to, to match closely the Housing Benefit rules. We therefore propose the following set of criteria to calculate bedroom entitlement. A maximum of two people can share a bedroom. Household members living together as a couple will be assessed as requiring one bedroom unless there are exceptional circumstances. To calculate the bedroom eligibility we allow one bedroom for:

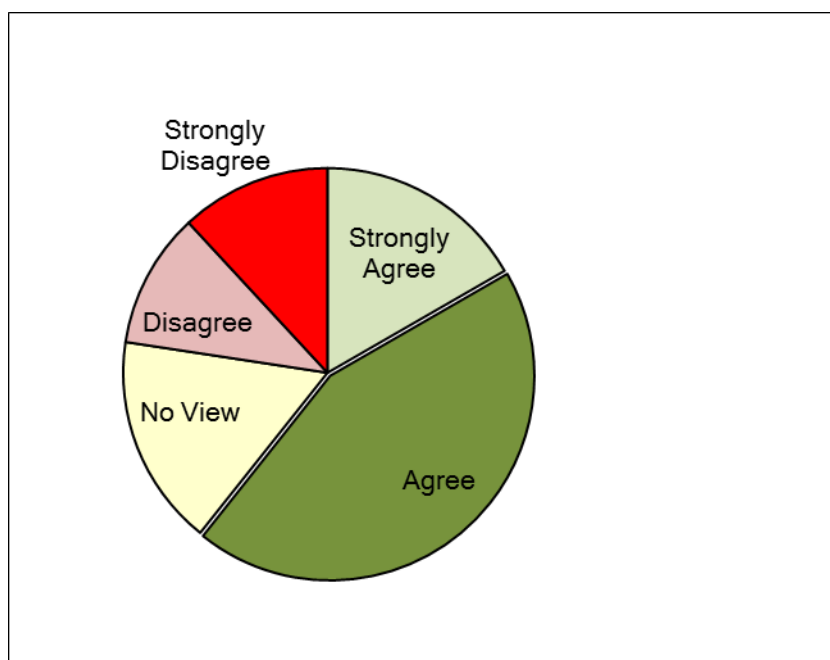
- A single applicant or couple (married or unmarried)

We allow one additional bedrooms for:

- Any two children of the same sex under the age of 16
- Any two children under 10 irrespective of sex
- Any other person aged 16 or over
- Any other child, (other than a child whose main home is elsewhere)
- A carer who does not live in the household but provides a household member with overnight care

When the bedroom calculation awards a separate bedroom for any other person over the age of sixteen, if the household has two same sex household members that wish to share a bedroom the applicant must sign a 'bedroom reduction declaration form'. This would allow applicants to express interest on properties smaller than the bedroom calculation. The applicant will be made aware that their current banding could be affected and should they need to reapply for social housing this declaration will be taken into account when calculating the bedroom requirement. When letting houses, priority will normally be given to households with children under the age of 16. Individual landlord's letting policies or local planning policies can affect the size of the households that may apply for particular properties. Any such restrictions will be included in the property advert. (See Section 13.1 (a) Bedroom Matrix) Do you agree with this change?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	16.7%	14
Agree	44.0%	37
No View	16.7%	14
Disagree	10.7%	9
Strongly Disagree	11.9%	10
If you disagree please tell us why		17
<i>answered question</i>		84
<i>skipped question</i>		29



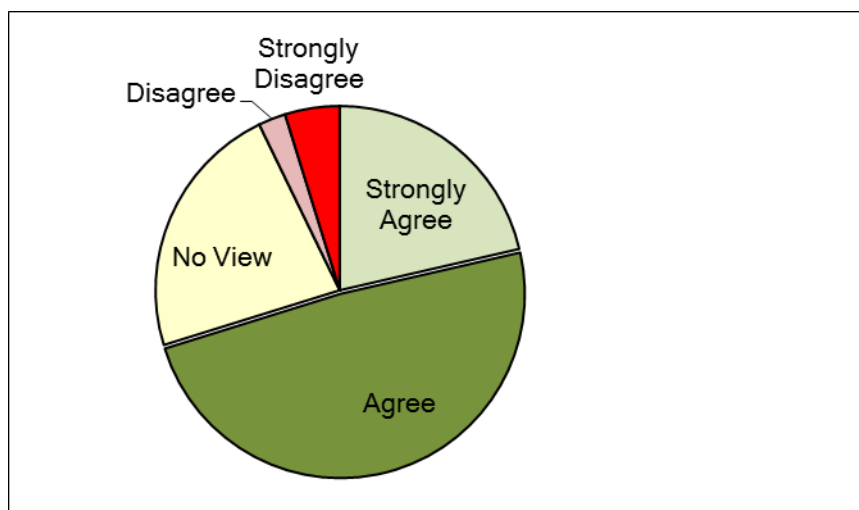
Respondents that disagreed have provided the following comments:

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
1	I don't agree with bedroom matrix change in some cases. I feel that when they state on property adverts that priority may be given to people who are downsizing, i feel this is wrong and they shouldn't be made high priority when they are adequately housed.
2	private tenants had to pay more since last year
3	There should be no restriction on who can apply for any property - the criteria should determine acceptance or denial of the application. This approach would enable larger properties to be filled (accepting the rent increase) rather than left empty. However, should a more suitable, smaller property become available the 'misallocated' applicant should be given the loaded option to move.
4	my son on waiting list 5yrs, &only once offered a bedsit. he has been with us 18 mnths via break up of relationship, we are both in our 60's husband has a health problem, i have severe depression, & because we are private he doesnt get anything. he is 26, working, NO family. we are moving to a bungalow so i dont know what he will do.
5	i had no choice to be placed for 1 bedroomed, even though i sleep in a seperate room due to the nature of my partners work and time of leaving for work and that my daughter and grandson often stay over night to help me ,to get up and dressed.
6	Priority should be around need, especially vulnerable people, not about whether there are children under 16.
7	Comment was made that with households where the ages differed widely (5 & 14 year old girls) would be unfair. Additionally felt that families where children are from previous relationship/marriages should not be expected to share. Attendees felt that there was no account made for disability requirements.
8	The problem with allocating on the basis children of different sexes under 10 can share comes when those children become over 10 - moving children is unsettling and could result in having to move schools/away from friends and family. I don't think this is a sensible criteria, just a future problem that will come back to the authority to be solved.
9	the only part i disagree with is that the age should be lower than aged 10 for different sexes to share a bedroom we are in a world now where children are more sexually aware at an early age.
10	Are you suggesting that two people sleep together even though they are not married and not in a relationship
11	This does not take into account the size of the bedrooms, children's individual needs, disability, learning difficulties or other needs, age difference between the children, whether they have the same mother/father! It is not right to expect two children to share the same room if one has special needs and the other is a teenager that needs their own space etc... It does not take into account either, that perhaps some people would pay for the extra bedroom even if they are only entitled to 1 extra... which would make swapping for families that wanted to downsize a lot easier. The bedroom tax is a joke. These sorts of things have to be worked out on an individual basis/circumstance.
12	I disagree strongly that children of opposite sex should share a bedroom until 10 years old. It should stay at 7 years old. There is a massive difference between a 7 year old and a 10 year old I think it's very important that they have their own space at this age.
13	priority to those with children under 16 encourages the type of thinking that kept the recent murders of 6 children housed at public expense. Contraception/abortion is free and freely available in this country.
14	disagree that you get a house if you have a child. All adult families are entitled to an outdoor area.
15	we need a 2 bedroom because of medical reasons and we are not offered one is there a good reason
16	There is no written allowance for medical need where one partner has a hospital bed and lots of equipment needing a separate bedroom to his wife. This should also be allowed for in benefits.
17	I think this should depend on how many years there is between same sex sharing....it's not fair that a child at preschool or early primary school should be sharing with a child at secondary school.....secondary school children need space to learn in their own space without extra noises from a small child!

Question 15

In line with Housing Benefit changes the Homefinder Somerset policy now states:- Applicants who are approved foster carers or are in the process of gaining approval may be granted an additional bedroom over and above the calculated bedroom need for the existing household. Only one additional bedroom will be granted in these circumstances. Do you agree with this change?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	21.4%	18
Agree	48.8%	41
No View	22.6%	19
Disagree	2.4%	2
Strongly Disagree	4.8%	4
If you disagree please tell us why		7
<i>answered question</i>		84
<i>skipped question</i>		29



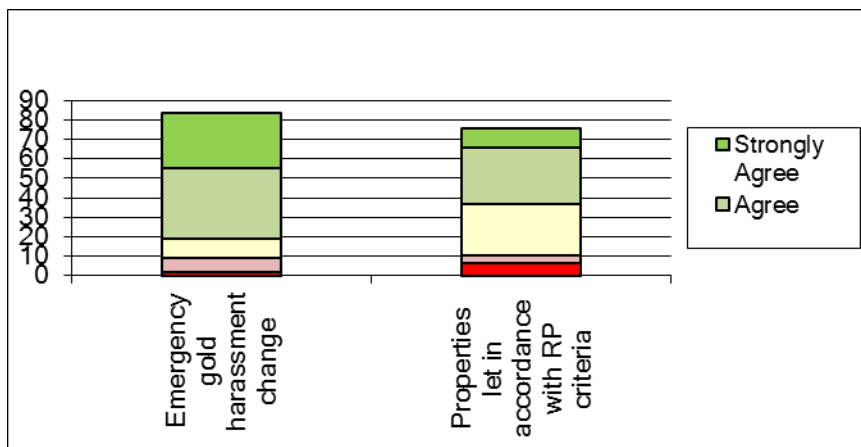
Those respondents that disagreed commented as follows:

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
1	because it is an extra income
2	Agree in principle, but foster carers with more than one child require more than one additional bedroom, obviously.
3	open to misuse/to obtain extra bedroom but not actively fostering.
4	No way
5	If you are an approved foster carer or becoming one, the likelihood is that you might like to foster MORE than one child. Surely, AGAIN this has to be worked out on an individual basis. If they are fostering 3 children, then they will need 3 extra bedrooms.. You can't expect foster children to live in the same bedroom together, especially if different sexes.
6	I have five children in a small three bedroom house they are not all my children three are mine two are partners and what help are we getting none so why should foster careers take priority I ring up and you lot just say you have to keep bidding miss berry I do bid and I could be number forty in the queue I have three boys sharing a bedroom one is ten one is seven the other is four I have two nine year old girls that r not sisters they have to share a tiny bedroom go to school together they r not twins not even sisters and no one cares about them and how it effects them as for the boys they don't have a lot of space either and constantly bicker because they get on top of each other Leon will be starting secondary school next year and he should have somewhere to go and do his homework that's nice and peaceful his own space. If me and my partner split up he would b entitled to a three bedroom house and I would be entitled to a three bedroom house we would both be on housing benefit and council tax benefit but we are not we

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
	pay everything and all I av asked for is a four bedroom house but like everyone else I have to wait annoys me how this bidding system works because I'm on silver and the woman next door to me with the same amount of people in it was on gold I asked my housing officer and she said she didn't even understand that so I'm sorry I'm not prepared to b pushed even further back in the queue for people that decide to foster also I would love to know why do people on housing benefit take priority for bigger properties I find this really unfair
7	i believe foster carers should only be given a child if they are homeowners as they clearly cannot afford a roof over their own heads if they are applying.

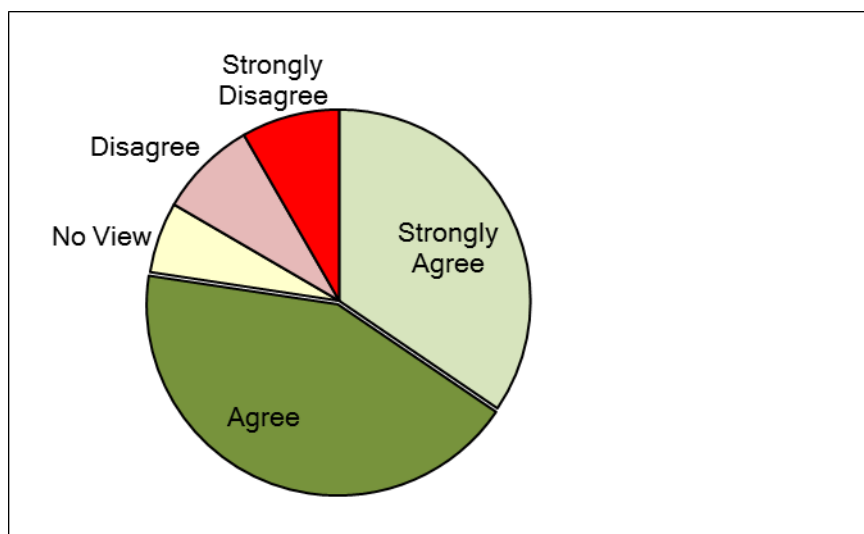
Question 16

We have made some amendments to the policy to reflect the way the Choice Based Lettings system actually works - we have also added the following statements:(See Section 24 of the policy - Selection Procedure)						
Answer Options	Strongly Agree	Agree	No View	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Response Count
If an applicant is placed in Gold or Emergency band to escape violence/harassment or threats of violence/harassment and express an interest in a property in the same general area the landlord or local authority may choose not to offer the property. (See Policy paragraph 24.5)	29	36	10	7	2	84
Local Authorities do not have nomination rights for all social housing. Not all applicants will be selected in accordance with the Homefinder Somerset Allocations Policy because some landlords may apply their own allocation criteria to those properties.(see Policy paragraph 24.7/8)	10	29	27	4	6	76
If you disagree please tell us why						15
						<i>answered question</i> 84
						<i>skipped question</i> 29



Question 17

The number of applicants refusing offers needs to be reduced. In future, if applicants refuse three suitable offers of properties they will be suspended from placing expressions of interest for three months. Do you agree? (See Section 26.7 of the policy Refusals)		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	34.5%	29
Agree	42.9%	36
No View	6.0%	5
Disagree	8.3%	7
Strongly Disagree	8.3%	7
If you disagree please tell us why		12
<i>answered question</i>		84
<i>skipped question</i>		29



Those respondents that disagreed commented as follows:

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
1	Each must be judged on the merits of the refusal.
2	It may be that the property offered is not adequate in location. for example I am told by homefinder that I am eligible for properties that are not suitable by reason of location to either my work or my partner's work
3	Some people, esp adults with learning disabilities require quite specific accommodation. It would be wrong to limit them to 3 offers, especially if these were unsuitable.
4	I don't see why this should be so, by refusing I am assuming there are many others in the queue waiting to take their place. What is the big deal? The problem is you only get a photo of the property and limited information. You may bid thinking a property is suitable but later upon the availability of more info realise it is not. So you may refuse for totally valid reasons
5	To suspend the right to express interest in property removes the element of choice that HFS is set up to provide. People who refuse an offer of a property do so knowing that there may be no further successful bids/offers this should be sufficient.
6	Should be longer or excluded
7	It should be none they bidded for it they should be made to take it they have a week to do there homework and if they don't like it they can pull themselves out of the house
8	Maybe be valid reasons for not accepting a property. Not near family, unable to get to work, isolated.
9	refusing a property does not make you any less in need of a property it just means that you

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
	have found the one you bidden on was unsuitable for whatever reason when in the process of accepting it
10	You are not always offered housing in the area you wish to live in, being offered housing in yeovil is ridiculous if you want taunton. This should be changed to give applicants the right housing, especially if like me, they have reason for the need like the children all being on autistic spectrum. being offered the correct number of bedrooms is not the way allocation on the area should be a major factor aswell. Especially if they have ties like schooling or family.
11	depends what the reasons are for refusing!!!
12	Although must ensure that Vulnerable applicants (eg fleeing domestic abuse) are not disadvantaged - not all situations are the same!

Question 18

Please tell us here if you have any other comments on the proposed policy or have any other comments to make.

Number	Response Text
1	i think when it says priority to applicants releasing family size home should apply to private tenants as well
2	think local people should be considered first.with our health we cannot have our son with us much longer, as need 2nd bedroom when move.sorry but if he wasnt english, had a family,on jsa he would probably been rehoused by now.not only that i wanted a bungalow in my home village, i was bidding, & each time an out sider became the tenant, seems to me,its noy what you know, it's who you know.
3	If a person is in desperate need to move especially if the have elderly parents,they keep bidding they should be considered for re-housing and not give properties to foreigners!
4	i am desperate to move for work and partners commute to work and have been placed 1,2 and 3 on properties but no offers and yet this week one of the properties i had bid on is back on and again i am number 1...
5	whether applicants have a local connection to area ie family
6	The proposed policy is adequate for its purpose. However, I would like to suggest that you make it easier for people to amend their registration details (updates) without the need to complete a new registration each time. For example a change of address, or the need to change 'local area' could be done without a complete new registration.
7	I feel that the search area is very, very confusing. I had at one stage 100's of garages from all over Somerset, I also find lots of exchanges when, infact, all I am looking for is a 1 bedroom property in or close to Taunton.
8	You don't seem to be changing CBL to make it more open for adults with learning disabilities. This is a major omission.
9	I think the gap between private and social housing is becoming less and that affordable rent policies are making social housing less appealing. I currently privately rent a 2 bed house with a garden for £575 pcm and even if I could secure social housing (I'm currently on a low income) the best I could hope for is a move out of my child's current school catchment area, to a 2 bed flat with no garden and all I would save is £40 pcm - but this would be spent on bus fares because the properties are out of town and I don't have a car. I don;t think the current government is interested in providing affordable housing and I think the whole issue of housing, privately renting/owning and social rents needs a proper review not just this tinkering round the edges.
10	properties should be awarded to those at the top of the bidding list for each band even if the property is listed as disabled if you are allowed to bid on it you should be offered it not rejected and those that are in gold band and have been listed on here for a long time should get priority
11	i do feel there is not enough suitable housing for the over 60 s.plus as any savings they have they need to pay everyday bills with if they have no other income but their basic pension. They would then not have to have their rent paid by the taxpayer.

Number	Response Text
12	I am not happy that it is suggested that my wife and I will have a low chance of getting offered a property. I think this is ridiculous because surely older people would be better to allocate to bungalows and not flats where they have to go upstairs or even put up with noisy persons above them and that does not include where for health reasons one or more may find it hard climbing stairs.
13	where due to ill health both persons (ie carer and helper) may wish to leave their different accommodation and share a larger place should be gold band
14	The main problem is the bedroom tax and homeswaps. IT is almost impossible to find a suitable homeswap because of allocation of bedrooms per family. I get that this is important, but since the government wants us to pay for the extra bedroom, you would be better off allowing people with for example 2 bedrooms to swap up to a house with 3 bedrooms, even if it wasn't essential for them, as long as they were willing to pay for it. THat way, the people in the 3 bed that couldn't afford or didn't want to pay for the extra bedroom, move out into a 2 bed, and you get the money for the 3 bed. Otherwise, you would just lose the money all together... and it would make it a quicker swap too, and less admin/hassle for you.
15	Is it right that a 50 year old female should be sharing a house with 4 males, one of whom is an alcoholic? I have to get dressed in the bathroom after a shower as I daren't walk round the house in hardly anything. What are you going to do for me? Nothing yet again. What are you going to do for people like me who actually go out and earn a living? Nothing yet again.
16	Whilst this current form of policy to home people generally works, some of us seem to be stagnating on the waiting list. After 9 years i am no nearer to being housed than i was when i first applied. Surely some consideration could be used for those who have waited patiently for so long
17	It should not be the case that applicants are downgraded if they move without examining the reasons for the move. I have been on the homefinders reg for a number of years and was put down to the lowest from Silver. I have little hope of being accepted altho I can no longer afford my current rent/charges. It would also be helpful if properties could be grouped in types (eg studio, flat, bungalows, houses. Also that flats display the floor on the brief details. Both would save time and errors - saving housing staff time also.
18	Do not provide housing to newcomers that move to this country for at least five years, and never offer financial aid for at least ten years.
19	more social housing should be built and unplanned checks on current accomodation to check entitlements are correct.
20	Making landlords financially liable for tenants non disclosure is acting as a disincentive to private sector landlords letting to social tenants, the same is also true of rent being paid to the tenant instead of the landlord. Change both to encourage more private landlords to let to social tenants.
21	I do think that more housing should be available to people over the age of 18yrs as they are not always able to live @ home. Also I don't think ex cons or people that continually break the law should have priority over law abiding citizens, I know this happens as I have seen it, if they go to prison they should be evicted.
22	i think you should be checking on the older people to see if they r actually living in the council house for the whole year as a lot of them have holiday homes on caravan parks where they stay for months at a time . some in 3 bed rooms , on the other hand if we didnt have over population in taunton no one would worry about peoples circumstances
23	I have found that even though I have been assessed for a wheelchair accessible property very few of these properties are on my list. Mainly unsuitable ones come up. Is that the lack of properties or faulty filters?
24	All properties should have dining rooms included in advert, EG we need a 4 bed, but only want to go to 1 area, where our family are, we would take a 3 with a dining room however it's not advertised, we have been bidding on 3's in wivey as we know the layouts of these houses, maybe include dining rooms as bedrooms/dining room?
25	I would like someone to come out and see my living conditions instead of diagnosing me over the phone or in writing I have a seven year old living here with learning issues who has a support worker at school who is part of social services and even she's not happy with the situation
26	In september 2013 I will have been on the housing list for ten years, I'm only in bronze band.

Number	Response Text
	Surely this should be looked into ? It doesnt seem fair that I'm so far down the list and will never be entitled to a house !
27	i think there needs to be a review of banding altogether. the new criterias seem pretty pointless to me when there are other areas that drastically need revising
28	I have been on the register for a very long time and have yet to be relocated, even though i have extreme circumstances i was only given a silver banding. A family from priorswood were given a house in west bagborough the area i have been trying to get for years, they could have had my house their children goto school in bishops lydeard and dont drive ! I think a new system of incorporating the exchanges would help avoid this in the future. S maxwell TA4 3BP
29	Make sure all policies/ rules are set out in plain english not big words etc so everyone can understand them.
30	I feel strongly that the bedroom tax is unfair and unjust, it disproportionately will affect those on low incomes or with disabilities.

4. Detailed Feedback on Stakeholder Consultation Survey

Question 1 – Details of Respondents

Answer Options	Member	Officer	Response Count
Mendip District Council	0	2	3
Sedgemoor District Council	2	4	6
South Somerset District Council	0	16	16
Taunton Deane Borough Council	0	3	3
West Somerset Somerset	0	1	1
Other (e.g. forum member)	0	0	0
Landlord (Please select)	0	9	9
Parish Council	1	0	0

The 9 landlords that responded are as follows:

- Falcon Rural
- Aster Living
- Guinness
- Homes in Sedgemoor
- Knightstone
- Magna West Somerset
- Sanctuary
- South Western Housing Society
- Taunton Association for the Homeless

Question 2

Select the option which best describes the one you are working in:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Supported	2.7%	1
General Needs	35.1%	13
Lettings	8.1%	3
Strategic	0.0%	0
Front Line	37.8%	14
Elected Member	2.7%	1
Parish Councillor	2.7%	1
Landlord Board response	0.0%	0
Other stakeholder	0.0%	0
Other please state	10.8%	4
<i>answered question</i>		37
<i>skipped question</i>		0

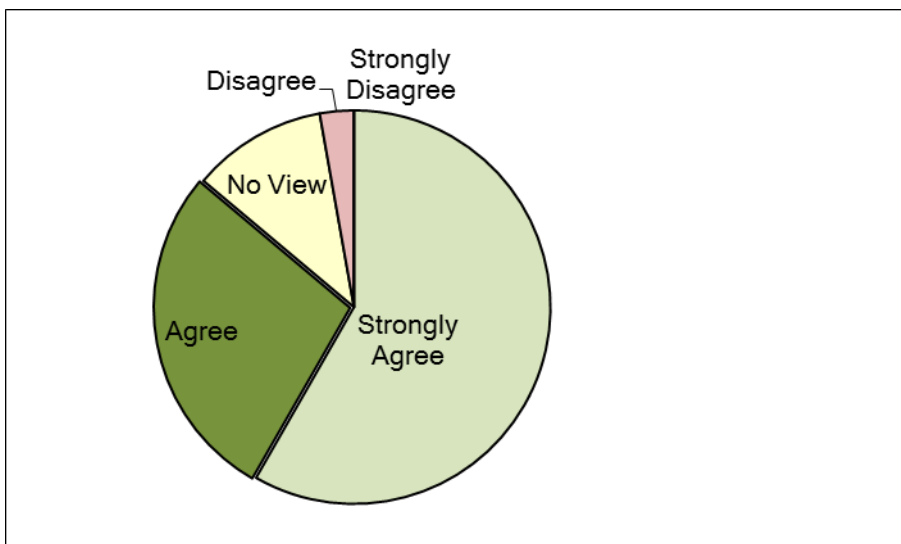
Of those that selected other – here are the details provided:

Number	Other please state
1	Housing Options and landlord services at TDBC.
2	homelessness
3	Housing Register
4	Recover monies paid by SSDC on clients behalf

Question 3

We already assess a household's finances to identify whether they have sufficient income or savings to be able to afford alternative housing - we now propose to make clear that this assessment will include any other property and land owned by anyone in the household. Do you agree with this change? (See Section 6.2 - 6.10 of the policy - Applicants Financial Resources)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	58.3%	21
Agree	27.8%	10
No View	11.1%	4
Disagree	2.8%	1
Strongly Disagree	0.0%	0
If you disagree please tell us why		1
<i>answered question</i>		36
<i>skipped question</i>		1



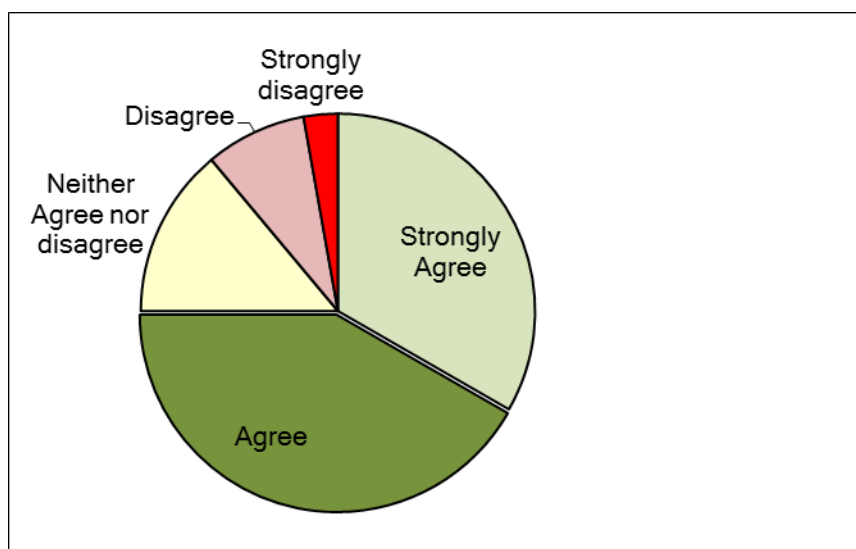
Those respondents that disagreed commented as follows:

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
1	We should also include something in the policy with regards to selling your home once you gain social housing as i do not think it is fair for apps to have a social housing tenancy and remain an o/occupier and gain financially from renting the home out etc. We need to explain the tenancy must be their main and principle home and they must sell/be actively selling within XXX period of time.

Question 4

Some applicants may be exempted from the financial assessment - currently those with medical or support needs or homeless applicants. We wish to change this so that only those with medical or support needs or those applicants that are underoccupying certain property types in certain high demand areas may also be exempt to ensure that we make the best use of the housing stock available. Do you agree with this change?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	33.3%	12
Agree	41.7%	15
Neither Agree nor disagree	13.9%	5
Disagree	8.3%	3
Strongly disagree	2.8%	1
If you disagree please tell us why		4
<i>answered question</i>		36
<i>skipped question</i>		1

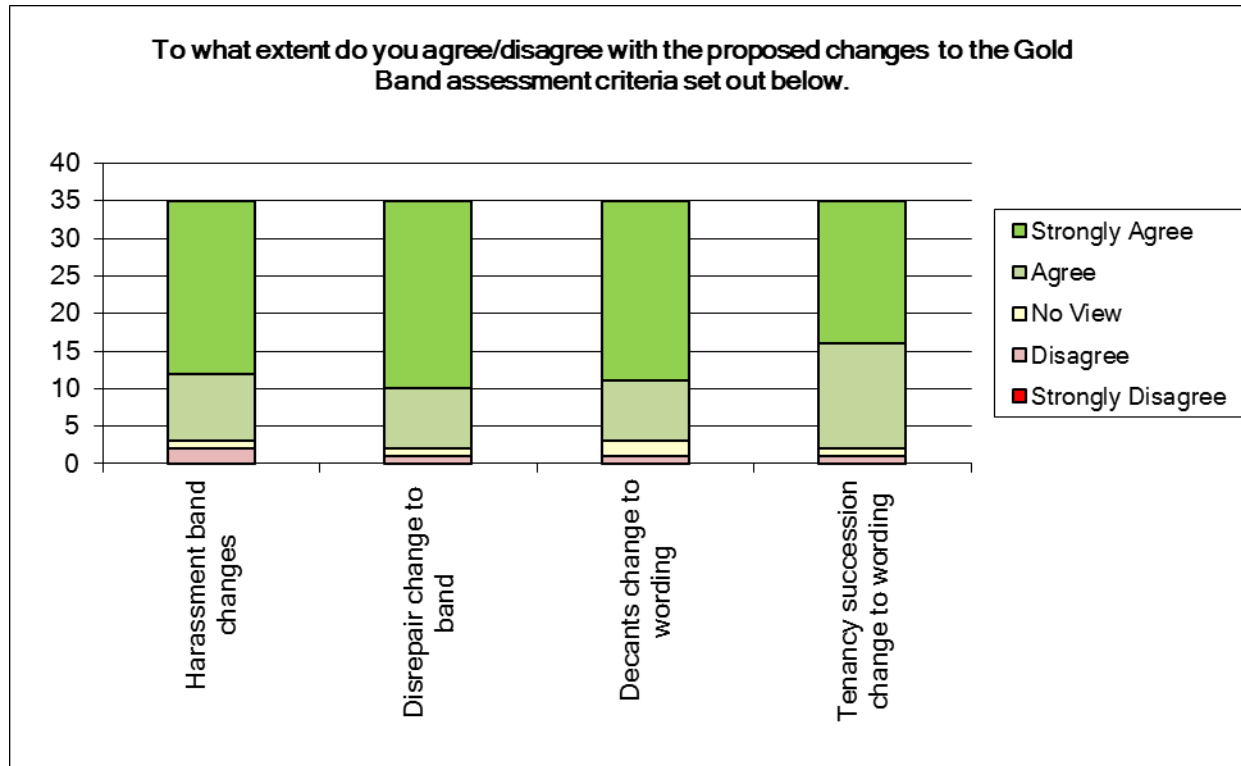


Those respondents that disagreed commented as follows:

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
1	Would need some clarification as to what would constitute high demand and who would determine such a decision - the strategic authority or the landlord. It would be helpful for this to be set out in the CBL policy. Note: This needs to only apply to social housing tenants in the Homefinder Somerset area.
2	I do not believe anyone should be exempt from a financial assessment
3	although have concerns that may not be applied fairly and consistently, even within individual council areas, as policy indicates that are dealt with on case by case basis.
4	It needs to be assessed whether the applicant can take care of thier own housing/support/medical needs with the finances they have - if they can then why should they be exempt? I do not understand the logic of this? Either you can financially take care of yourself or you can't! Surely?

Question 5

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the proposed changes to the Gold Band assessment criteria set out below.							
Answer Options	Strongly Agree	Agree	No View	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Response Count	
Applicants who are victims of harassment or violence must express an interest in properties that are away from the source of the harassment/violence and this banding will now be time limited to 3 months and subject to review and re-assessment following the initial 3 month period. See (6.12.4 Harassment)	23	9	1	2	0	35	
Disrepair - this is an existing banding criteria but we now wish to add a statement that makes clear that all cases of disrepair must be reported to the landlord since this is a requirement of the disrepair legislation. (See section 6.12.6 Under Occupation)	25	8	1	1	0	35	
Decants - where tenants need to move because of works being done to their properties - we wish to ensure that this banding only applies to applicants of Homefinder Somerset landlords in properties within the Homefinder Somerset area. (See section 6.12.11 Decants)	24	8	2	1	0	35	
Tenancy Succession - we added this banding in in 2011 to help those applicants that had been left in a property with no legal right to remain there. We now wish to add that those applicants allocated this band criteria will have expressions of interest placed for them if they haven't had an accepted offer accommodation within 9 months. (See section 6.12.12 Tenancy Succession)	19	14	1	1	0	35	
If you disagree please say why						1	
						<i>answered question</i>	35
						<i>skipped question</i>	2



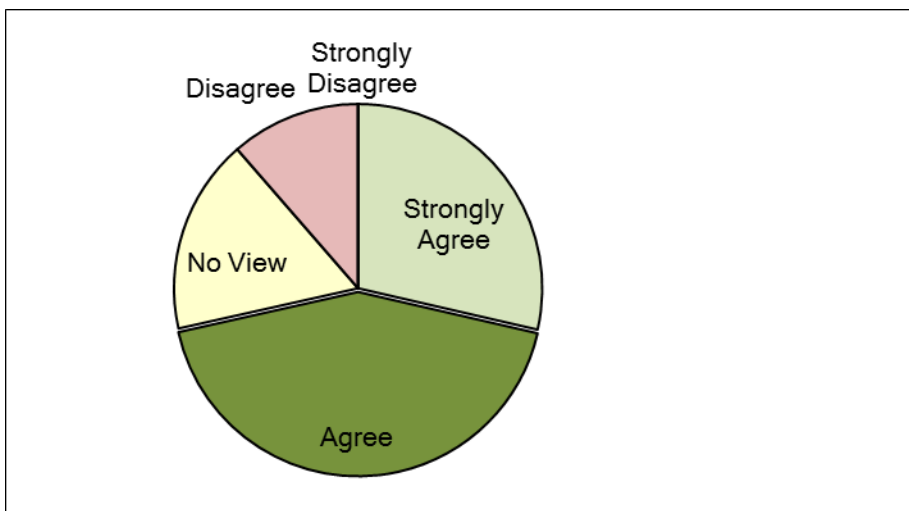
Those respondents that disagreed commented as follows:

Number	If you disagree please say why
1	Time limited restrictions for victims of violence and harassment coupled with reviews and reassessments, coupled with disrepair i.e. all cases of disrepair be reported to landlord, appears to be discriminating against the victims.

Question 6

At present there is a silver band reason for relationship breakdown where applicants are sharing a property but wish to live separately. We wish to remove this banding reason because it is hard to prove and the applicants affected could be placed into other silver band reasons (according to their circumstances). Do you agree with this change?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	28.6%	10
Agree	42.9%	15
No View	17.1%	6
Disagree	11.4%	4
Strongly Disagree	0.0%	0
If you disagree please say why		5
<i>answered question</i>		35
<i>skipped question</i>		2



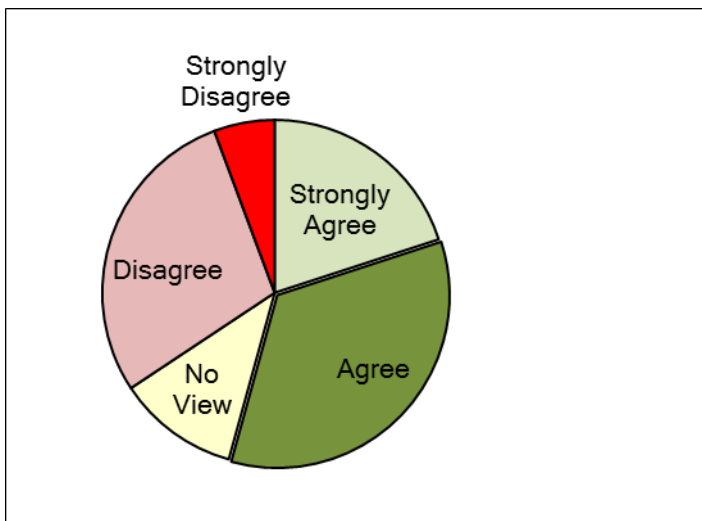
Those respondents that disagreed commented as follows:

Number	If you disagree please say why
1	However, we are very concerned that the under 35's could be disadvantaged as they would not be placed into silver band as is implied in this question.
2	we disagree because we are not clear how the applicants will be able to demonstrate a clear need to move unless there are other significant factors such as disability or health
3	hard to prove, lots of things hard to prove, is that a valid justification!
4	Just because something is difficult for us isnt a justifiable reason not to assist someone.
5	i believe that further evidence should be submitted to support the application.

Question 7

Silver Band - Sharing Facilities/Lodging - we wish to introduce an age restriction to this band so that only applicants over 35 years of age will be able to be given this band reason. This change is to reflect the changes being made to Housing Benefits for applicants that are under 35 and renting in the private sector. Given the shortage of social housing we feel that this change will promote equality between the social and private rented sectors for single applicants that are under 35 who would go into Bronze band. Do you agree with this change?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	20.0%	7
Agree	34.3%	12
No View	11.4%	4
Disagree	28.6%	10
Strongly Disagree	5.7%	2
If you disagree please tell us why		11
<i>answered question</i>		35
<i>skipped question</i>		2



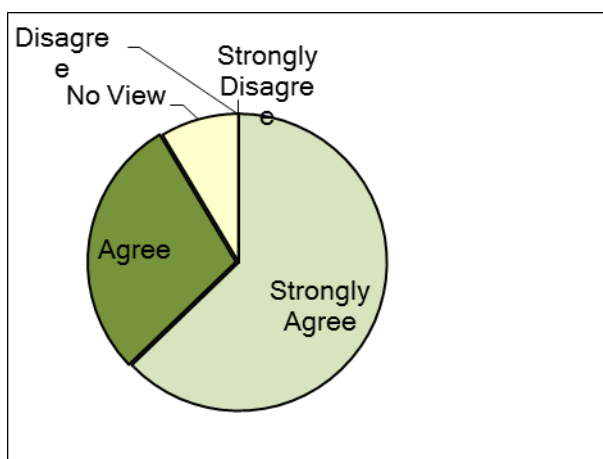
Those respondents that disagreed commented as follows:

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
1	but I feel that anyone with an AST in a HMO should be banded in bronze as adequately housed as they have security of tenure
2	Sharing facilities/living with family/HMO all Bronze regardless of age
3	Don't consider that applicants would be treated fairly - under 35's couple living in shared accommodation would be banded silver and a single under 35's would be banded bronze according to the policy proposal - thus not fair. Applicants, who are sharing, with a desire to move should be recognised as being in housing need and banded in silver.
4	arbitrary age that has been applied by Government for private rented only, social tenants still eligible for full HB on 1 bed flats, so disagree that it is introduced under the cover of Welfare reform. Disadvantages pregnant applicants under 35 who are sharing as would be bronze, with no prospect of being housed until the baby was possibly a couple of years old, but if 35yrs would be silver, and could be housed prior to baby being born if applicant in late 30s. May increase applicants U35 claiming to be homeless and using real address as a C/O address, will be difficult to weed out the true homeless applicants from a paper form. Not sure why we should be introducing equity between social & Private sectors to the lowest denominator. Also

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
	no incentive for parents to keep a younger child at home with no prospect of social housing via Register, very little HIMO/shared accomm in TDBC area, so limited ability to resolve their own housing without being homeless and going via limited vacancies within TAH.
5	Query what would happen to Applicants with child(ren) sharing parents home - would priority be afforded to them in another way?
6	Regardless of age or legislation - those in housing need who are sharing facilities/lodging are all in the same boat and should be treated the same.
7	this does not give applicants choice as they may wish to pay top ups of rent. We don't feel this reflects our ethos as a provider of social housing
8	Would it not be a better idea to promote better rights for those in private rented accommodation, than downgrade social sector rented accommodation to the same level
9	Lodging is not secure - Bronze banded would give opportunity to secure accommodation (AST) but silver would increase this --- If however they are lodging with 'family' or 'friends' then agree in full with bronze banding!
10	This age group are finding it very difficult to find accommodation since HB changes and are the main age group most PSL would prefer not to take. I feel we will be making housing solutions worse for this age group y reducing the band to bronze
11	The issue at hand here is the ability to pay the rent which may or may not be through Housing Benefit - to link banding to HB eligibility seems a little odd. It doesn't create equality between sectors - if I am 25 but can pay the rent, I can move into the private rented sector. You are confusing need with ability to pay

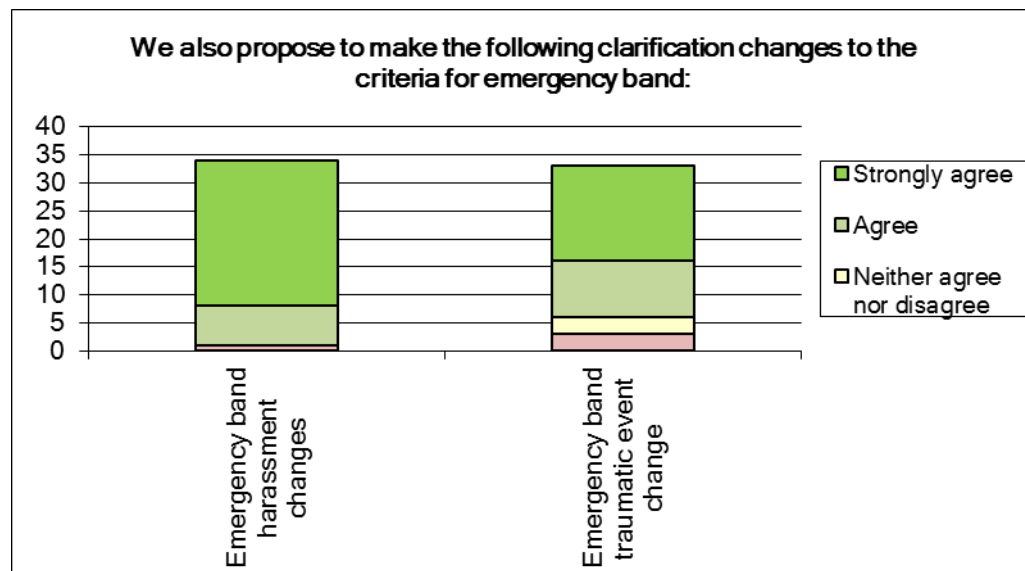
Question 8

Within the current policy there are a number of reasons why an applicant may be in bronze band - we would like to list all of these reasons within the bronze band section of the policy to make it easier for applicants to understand. Do you agree with this change?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	62.9%	22
Agree	28.6%	10
No View	8.6%	3
Disagree	0.0%	0
Strongly Disagree	0.0%	0
If you disagree please tell us why		0
<i>answered question</i>		35
<i>skipped question</i>		2



Question 9

We also propose to make the following clarification changes to the criteria for emergency band:							
Answer Options	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Response Count	
Emergency band harassment changes	26	7	0	1	0	34	
Emergency band traumatic event change	17	10	3	3	0	33	
If you disagree please tell us why						4	
						<i>answered question</i>	34
						<i>skipped question</i>	3

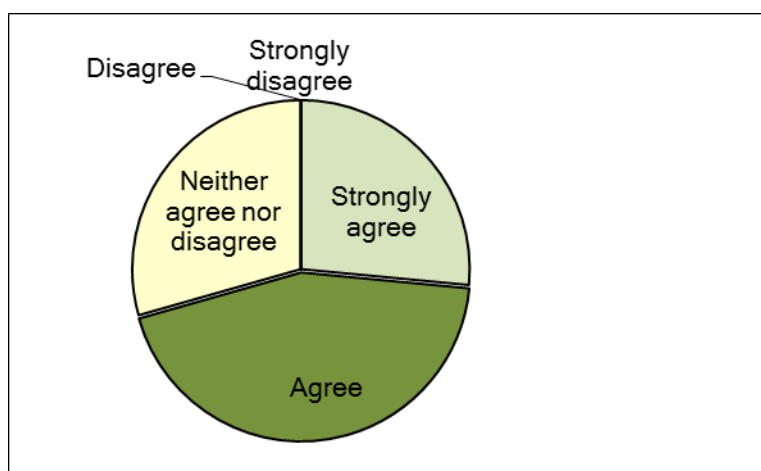


Those respondents that disagreed commented as follows:

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
1	A traumatic event may occur in the are where they live and they may wish to move from trauma of being in the same area, not just the house. If for example a sexual assault had taken place near by their home (a neighbour perhaps) but not in their current home. I guess it depends whether they want to move from a traumatic home or traumatic area, how far do they ant to move to rehabilitate?
2	7.1d - may be reasonable to extend to the home or immediate vicinity, such as the estate or street
3	we would like to add or the immediate vicinity. It might be an incident in a communal area of a block of flats, an immediate neighbours garden or for example a fatal accident to a family member on a road overlooked by the property
4	1. to simplistic, a case by case basis would be a more prudent approach. 2. See above.

Question 10

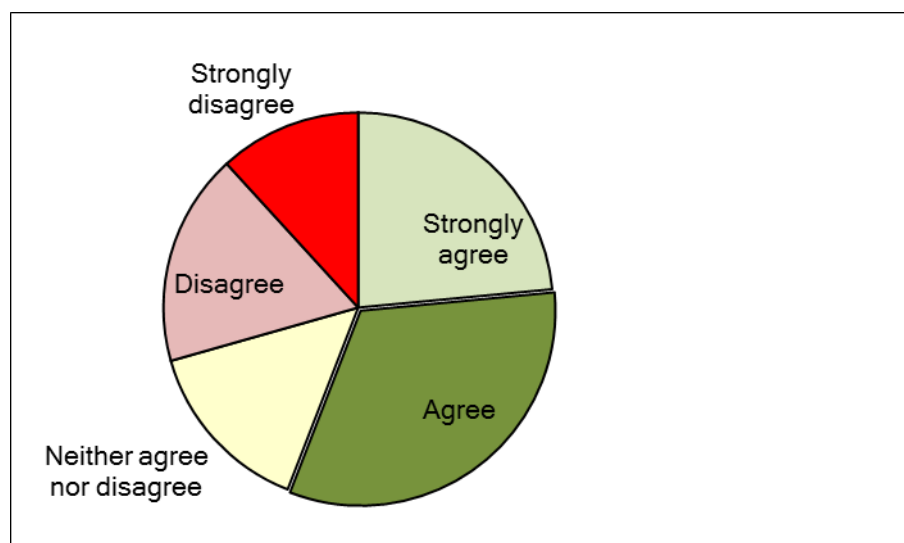
We have made amendments to section 8 of the Policy to make it clearer to applicants the difference between an application (sometimes referred to as the registration date) and an effective date in band. Do you think these changes have helped to make these distinctions clearer?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly agree	26.5%	9
Agree	44.1%	15
Neither agree nor disagree	29.4%	10
Disagree	0.0%	0
Strongly disagree	0.0%	0
If you disagree please tell us why		0
<i>answered question</i>		34
<i>skipped question</i>		3



Question 11

The government has issued guidance asking that local authorities give some form of preference to armed forces personnel (past and present). We propose that for the following groups: (a) former members of the Armed Forces that have left the services in the last 5 years (b) serving members of the Armed Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service (c) bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving Services Family Accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner (d) serving or former members of the Reserve Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service We will give these applicants an effective date in band that will be backdated five years from the date of application. Do you agree with this way of giving these groups additional preference?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly agree	23.5%	8
Agree	32.4%	11
Neither agree nor disagree	14.7%	5
Disagree	17.6%	6
Strongly disagree	11.8%	4
If you disagree please tell us why		11
<i>answered question</i>		34
<i>skipped question</i>		3



Those respondents that disagreed commented as follows:

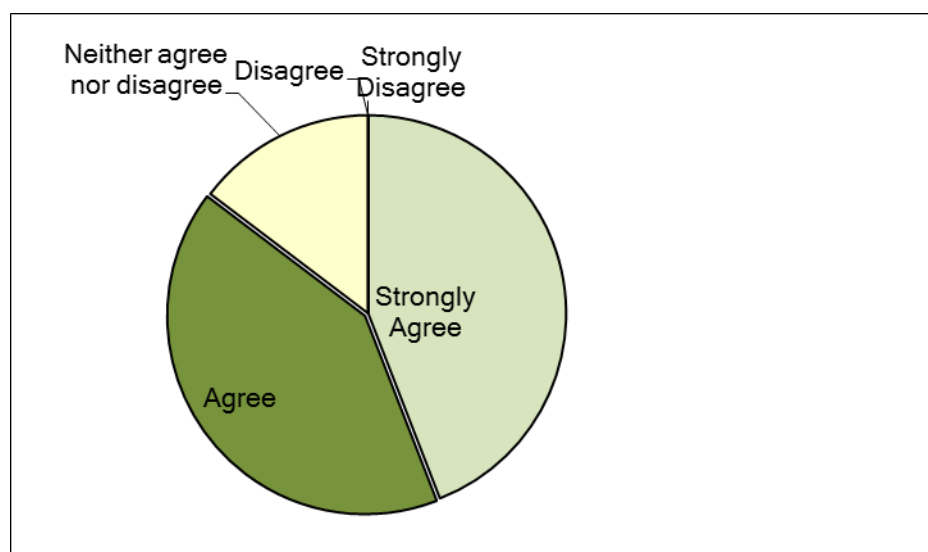
Number	If you disagree please tell us why
1	I feel that the group should be amended to not include those personnel who are dishonourably discharged from the forces. I personally feel that 5 years is too long an incentive and hope that they will still be subject to the financial assessment and take into account the other options they have available to them such as armed forces home buy
2	I think that 5year backdate is excessive in our area of high housing need, it will mean that any ex serviceman will in many cases end up top of the shortlist.
3	we consider the preference should be to backdate a maximum of 12 months for Gold Band applicants and 24 months Silver Band applicants and 36 months for Bronze Band applicants.
4	Think 5 years is too generous, suggest 2 years

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
5	I believe these groups should have priority and recognition for their services, to place them in a better position than joe average.
6	think service personel that get a large pay out should not be given priority
7	Its their choice to be in the forces, its not World War One and no one has drafted them. Why should they get preference for a career choice?
8	Why can't they qualify on other grounds, do we extend this to police, ambulance, fire brigade, nurses, simplistic politics!
9	Backdating of 5 years seems to be excessive. However, the disproportionate representation of ex-forces in unsecure housing and homeless indicates a need to target support as well as housing on this sector to tackle this trend.
10	why former members who have left within the last 5 years?
11	We do not agree with them being given any preference at all - this is a political decision not one based on housing need. You should rise above political viewpoints and ignore the government guidance. Why should someone in the armed forces get higher priority than a nurse, social worker or anyone else

Question 12

Changes in circumstance - we have made some changes to paragraph 9.1 and 9.2 to clarify for applicants what counts as a change in circumstances and to stress that it is in an applicants' best interests to tell us about these changes quickly. Do you agree with these changes?

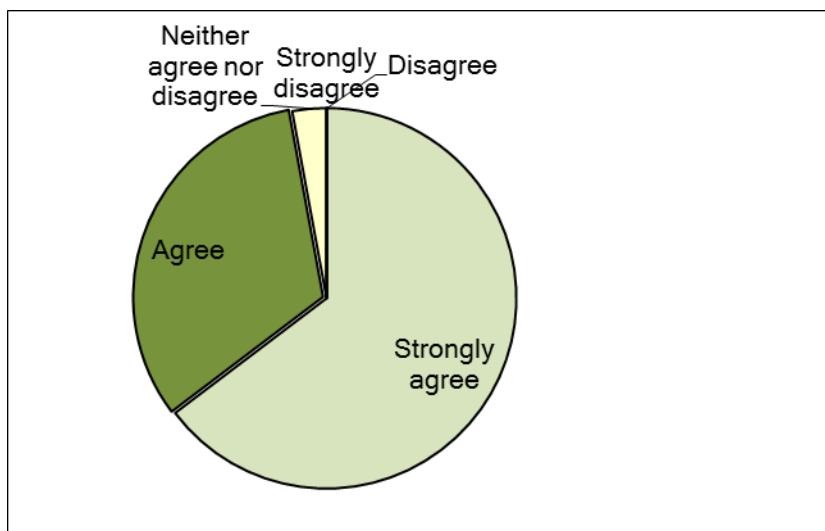
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	44.1%	15
Agree	41.2%	14
Neither agree nor disagree	14.7%	5
Disagree	0.0%	0
Strongly Disagree	0.0%	0
If you disagree please tell us why		0
<i>answered question</i>		34
<i>skipped question</i>		3



Question 13

We have added some clarification to paragraph 29.1 of the policy to make it clear to applicants the consequences of making false statements on their application form and in subsequent exchanges of information with us. Do you agree with this change?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly agree	64.7%	22
Agree	32.4%	11
Neither agree nor disagree	2.9%	1
Disagree	0.0%	0
Strongly disagree	0.0%	0
If you disagree please tell us why		1
	<i>answered question</i>	34
	<i>skipped question</i>	3



Question 14

The government is implementing changes to the way in which Housing Benefit is calculated regarding the number of bedrooms. because this will affect so many of the applicants for social housing we think it would be best to change the way we calculate the number of bedrooms that an applicant is entitled to, to match closely the Housing Benefit rules. We therefore propose the following set of criteria to calculate bedroom entitlement. A maximum of two people can share a bedroom. Household members living together as a couple will be assessed as requiring one bedroom unless there are exceptional circumstances. To calculate the bedroom eligibility we allow one bedroom for:

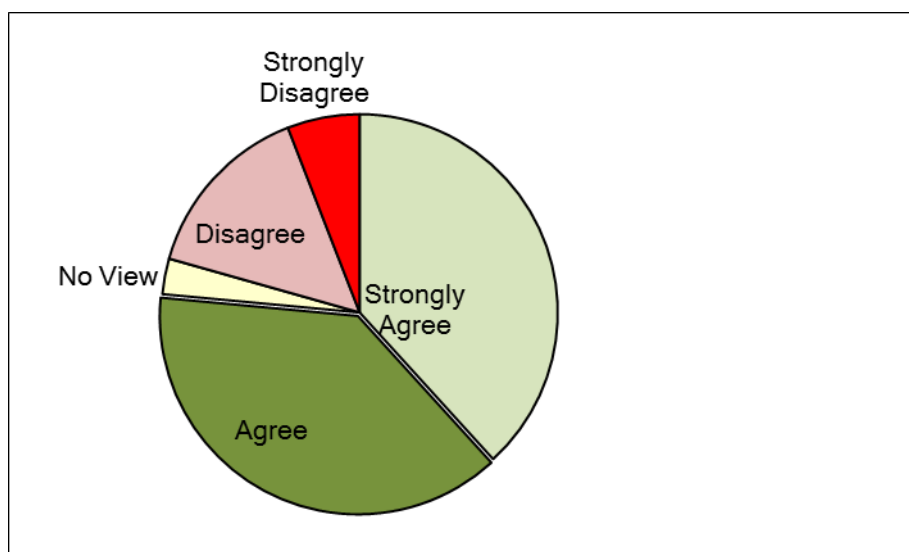
- A single applicant or couple (married or unmarried)

We allow one additional bedrooms for:

- Any two children of the same sex under the age of 16
- Any two children under 10 irrespective of sex
- Any other person aged 16 or over
- Any other child, (other than a child whose main home is elsewhere)
- A carer who does not live in the household but provides a household member with overnight care

When the bedroom calculation awards a separate bedroom for any other person over the age of sixteen, if the household has two same sex household members that wish to share a bedroom the applicant must sign a 'bedroom reduction declaration form'. This would allow applicants to express interest on properties smaller than the bedroom calculation. The applicant will be made aware that their current banding could be affected and should they need to reapply for social housing this declaration will be taken into account when calculating the bedroom requirement. When letting houses, priority will normally be given to households with children under the age of 16. Individual landlord's letting policies or local planning policies can affect the size of the households that may apply for particular properties. Any such restrictions will be included in the property advert. (See Section 13.1 (a) Bedroom Matrix) Do you agree with this change?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	38.2%	13
Agree	38.2%	13
No View	2.9%	1
Disagree	14.7%	5
Strongly Disagree	5.9%	2
If you disagree please tell us why		10
<i>answered question</i>		34
<i>skipped question</i>		3



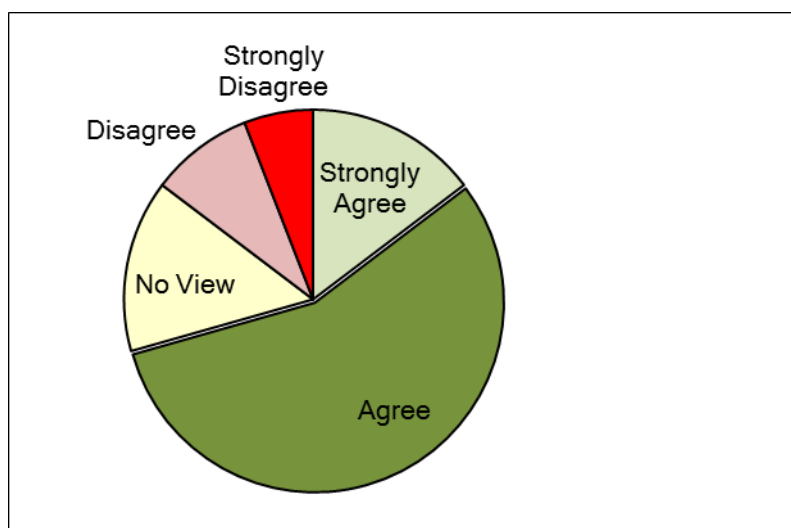
Those respondents that disagreed commented as follows:

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
1	I understand why you are making these changes but I feel it reduces choice for working people on low incomes who would really benefit from a room for each child. Also it moves away from a need to look at child density issues to create balanced communities, particularly on new build schemes.
2	have reservations although accept that L/lords will not allocate to applicants that can not afford rent, but if a household is not reliant on HB they are being penalised, and will not be able to bid on accommodation that they may be able to afford. If a band does not increase until the oldest child is 10 years, it can mean that 2 children of opposite sex may be sharing when the eldest is 12 or 13 years, or possibly more.
3	Needs to be made clear in the advert.
4	I do think, however, that some applicants may wish to pay extra for a larger property and they should be allowed to bid for these properties (they may be working and can afford it)
5	I agree with the proposed bedroom standard. I do not agree that priority will be given to households with children under 16. I'm also not sure that I agree with the idea that someone will be prevented from further allocation because of the declaration.
6	Disagreed with the Government assessment of bedroom requirements - so totally disagree with this too! But understand why it needs to be changed.
7	we feel this severely limits applicants choice. Their household details at time of offer may change at any time. If people can find a way to top up their housing benefit to meet their rent why should they be disallowed from bidding. We have concerns about the impact of our communities and children's development if all homes are filled to the brim with children, particularly in homes where bedrooms are small. We may end up statutorily overcrowding our homes. Regarding discussion item at 13.1 of policy we wonder what Environmental Health teams response will be - will they serve overcrowding notices on RPs where families have chosen to overoccupy
8	Govt policy unrealistic
9	Why max on two people per room, if the room is large enough then surely three children could share. Similarly if the room is too small it may only be adequate for 1 child. Should the criteria not be based on available space?
10	Could disadvantage certain applicants and place them in a position where they cannot obtain accommodation.

Question 15

In accordance with government guidance we have clarified our position with regard to additional bedrooms and foster carers (see Policy section 13.6) such that it now states: Applicants who are approved foster carers or are in the process of gaining approval may be granted an additional bedroom over and above the calculated bedroom need for their existing household. Only one additional bedroom will be granted in these circumstances. Do you agree with this change?

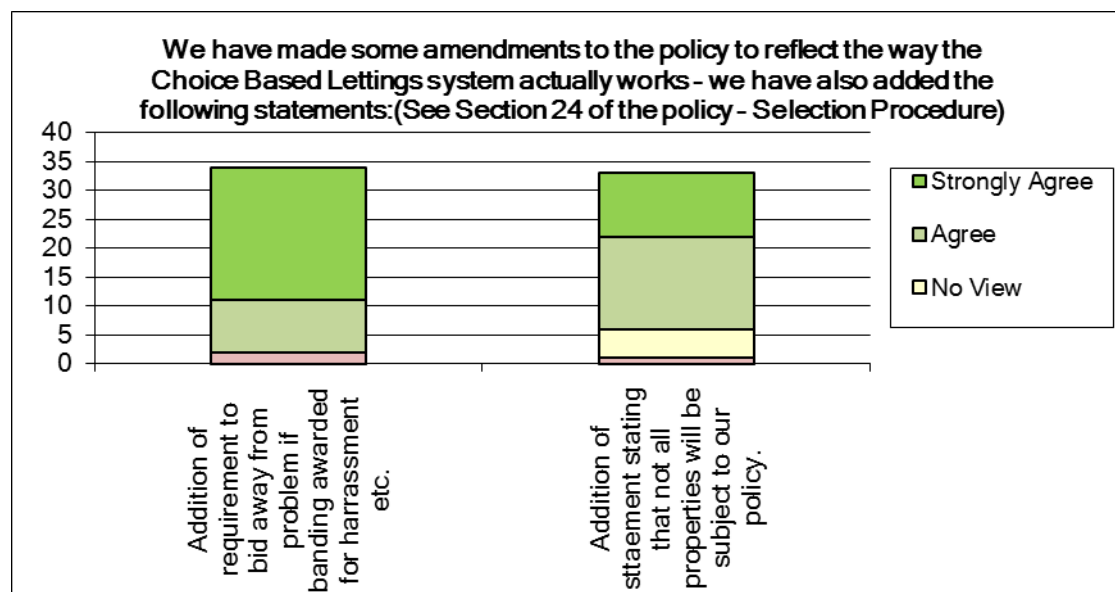
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	14.7%	5
Agree	55.9%	19
No View	14.7%	5
Disagree	8.8%	3
Strongly Disagree	5.9%	2
If you disagree please tell us why		7
	<i>answered question</i>	34
	<i>skipped question</i>	3



Number	If you disagree please tell us why
1	but believe that this should be reviewed periodically if they have not taken on a foster child
2	But on the condition that the extra bedroom award will be removed if fostering approval is not then granted.
3	Disagreed with the Government assessment of bedroom requirements - so totally disagree with this too! But understand why it needs to be changed.
4	we request more flexibility in cases where foster children are disabled/have medical needs where they are unable to share a bedroom
5	As above, surely with the lack of foster carers, this is short sighted!
6	It depends how many children they are approved for fostering, if its a sibling group of three then one bedroom is useless
7	Not sure with this one. We dont think people who are only in the process of gaining approval should be allowed - also familys who need the larger houses should be allocated prior to a Foster Parent who may not have a foster child at that time - difficult - should be able to bid but some sort of system to put familys and foster parents with the right number of children for that property first !!!!!!!

Question 16

We have made some amendments to the policy to reflect the way the Choice Based Lettings system actually works - we have also added the following statements:(See Section 24 of the policy - Selection Procedure)						
Answer Options	Strongly Agree	Agree	No View	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Response Count
Addition of requirement to bid away from problem if banding awarded for harrasment etc.	23	9	0	2	0	34
Addition of sttaement stating that not all properties will be subject to our policy.	11	16	5	1	0	33
If you disagree please tell us why						2
						<i>answered question</i> 34
						<i>skipped question</i> 3



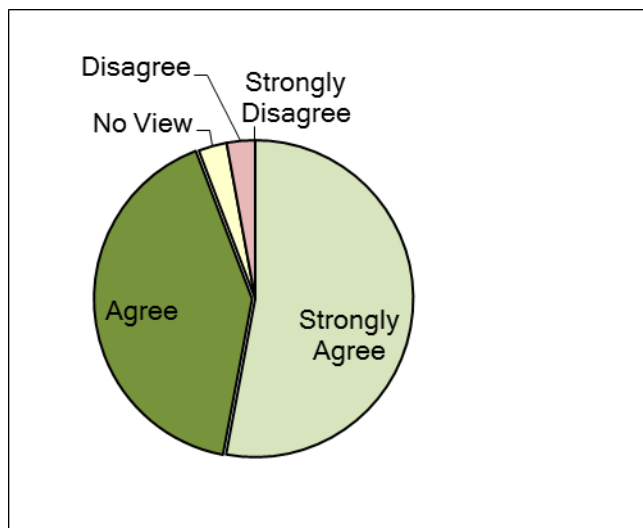
Those respondents that disagreed commented as follows:

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
1	A case by case basis would be fairer
2	RE first point, care needs to be taken to ensure that a move is not discounted due a seeming proximity that an applicants detailed local knowledge allows them to justify and explain - just needs to be some discretion in this.

Question 17

To reduce the number of applicants refusing offers, we want to make a change to the current action that is taken when an applicant refuses 3 formal suitable offers of accommodation. Applicants would be suspended from bidding for 3 months rather than being placed into Bronze Band for 3 months, excluding accepted homeless cases. Do you agree with this change? (See Section 26.7 of the policy Refusals)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	52.9%	18
Agree	41.2%	14
No View	2.9%	1
Disagree	2.9%	1
Strongly Disagree	0.0%	0
If you disagree please tell us why		2
<i>answered question</i>		34
<i>skipped question</i>		3



Those respondents that disagreed commented as follows:

Number	If you disagree please tell us why
1	we feel this could be extended to applicants who are observed to be bidding with no real intention to take up an offer if top of the shortlist. These people waste professional time and delay others in serious need from getting housed more quickly
2	As above

Question 18

Please tell us here if you have any other comments on the proposed policy or have any other comments to make.

Number	Response Text
1	I propose the suggestion of closing the Homefinder Somerset register to households who do not have a local connection to the area. I also propose that gold back lacking two bedrooms should only apply to households in the Homefinder Somerset area.
2	Those who own their own home and wish to apply for social housing must understand that the tenancy must be their main & principle home and that they must attempt to sell/sell their home within a set period of time.
3	Q4. Agree with the principle but proposed alteration does not highlight under occupiers of 'social rented housing!'; Policy ref 29.1 - I would insert 'steps WILL be taken...'; Policy ref 13.1 I cannot see the need for the 'Bedroom Reduction Declaration' it will potentially put more pressure on smaller accommodation e.g. 3 bed case declaring would consider a 2 bed which is in higher demand??; Policy ref. 13.6 I would expect foster carers to be Approved not 'in the process of'.. too many complications of under occupation and having housed an applicant in a property they would not normally be entitled to.
4	Is it possible to have some savings/equity limits actually stated? Also, some guidance on what is considered 'affordable'? Does the policy clearly state what the implications of not informing HFS of any changes are?
5	We do not feel that bronze banding should be awarded to applicants with adequate financial resources. This does not meet our charitable aims as a RP. We also question the sense of keeping applicants with no housing need on the register given current demand. Para 13.3 - downsizing, we find this contradictory to suggest downsizers will not be restricted to a property size as long as it is 1 bedroom less than their current home. Won;t the bedroom tax bidding rules exclude their bids. Also this feels like additional preferential treatment to downsizers. 17.2 we suggest retain 5 working days as bank holidays will reduce the turnaround for reviews. 26.8 we wonder who will do the automatic bidding.
6	Friends should not be encouraged to apply together experience suggests they fall out then one leaves and the other is then subject to bedroom tax, they would be better each having a one bedroom flat in same block avoiding the friend left in situ becoming homeless through not being able to afford rent
7	How about building more social housing?
8	Please be careful so as not to add so many clauses that people no longer understand what it means, some of our applicants will struggle if it gets too complicated
9	We would still like to see an "official" 75% - 25% split over re lets allowing for internal moves not having to go through Direct Match - the real figure would be much less, but this would be useful.