

Gateway to Homechoice Annual Report 2015/16

This report is intended to summarise the main outcomes for the last year of the Gateway to Homechoice system of choice-based lettings.

How the scheme operates

The 8 local authorities in the Gateway to Homechoice scheme advertise vacancies in rented social housing using the same system that operates as follows:

- The local authorities (LAs) use a single IT system and web-site for registering applicants and advertising and allocating properties.
- Each week the vacant social housing in the area of operation of the 8 LAs is advertised on the Gateway to Homechoice website.
- Applicants who are registered can indicate up to 2 properties they are interested in either online or by phone.
- All of the vacancies advertised through the scheme are owned by councils or housing associations.
- All of the LAs operate the same allocation policy.
- The allocations policy sets out:
 - how people register;
 - how registered applicants can choose where they live; *and*
 - how the property is allocated to a specific household.

Qualification and Local Connection

People register with the LA where they live (or would like to live if they come from outside the sub-region of the scheme). Applicants with no local connection to any of the LAs are 'demoted' by one Band compared to someone with the same housing issue from within the area. An applicant will be considered to have a local connection to the sub-region if:

- their only or principle home is in one of the participating districts; *or*
- they were placed in specialised housing outside the sub-region, but previously lived here; *or*
- they are in permanent paid work in the sub-region; *or*
- they have an adult son, daughter, brother, sister, mother or father who lives here and has done so for at least 5 years.

Shortlisting

The principle of the system is that properties are normally let to the household that wants the property, and has been waiting the longest in the highest Band.

Available properties are advertised on the Gateway to Homechoice website for a week, starting on Thursday morning and closing on the following Wednesday at midnight. As people place their bids for housing, the system automatically compiles a shortlist of applicants. The order of the applicants is from Band A down to Band E. If 2 or more applicants have the same band, then the system will normally place the applicant with the longest date first.

The Gateway to Homechoice website address is www.gatewaytohomechoice.org

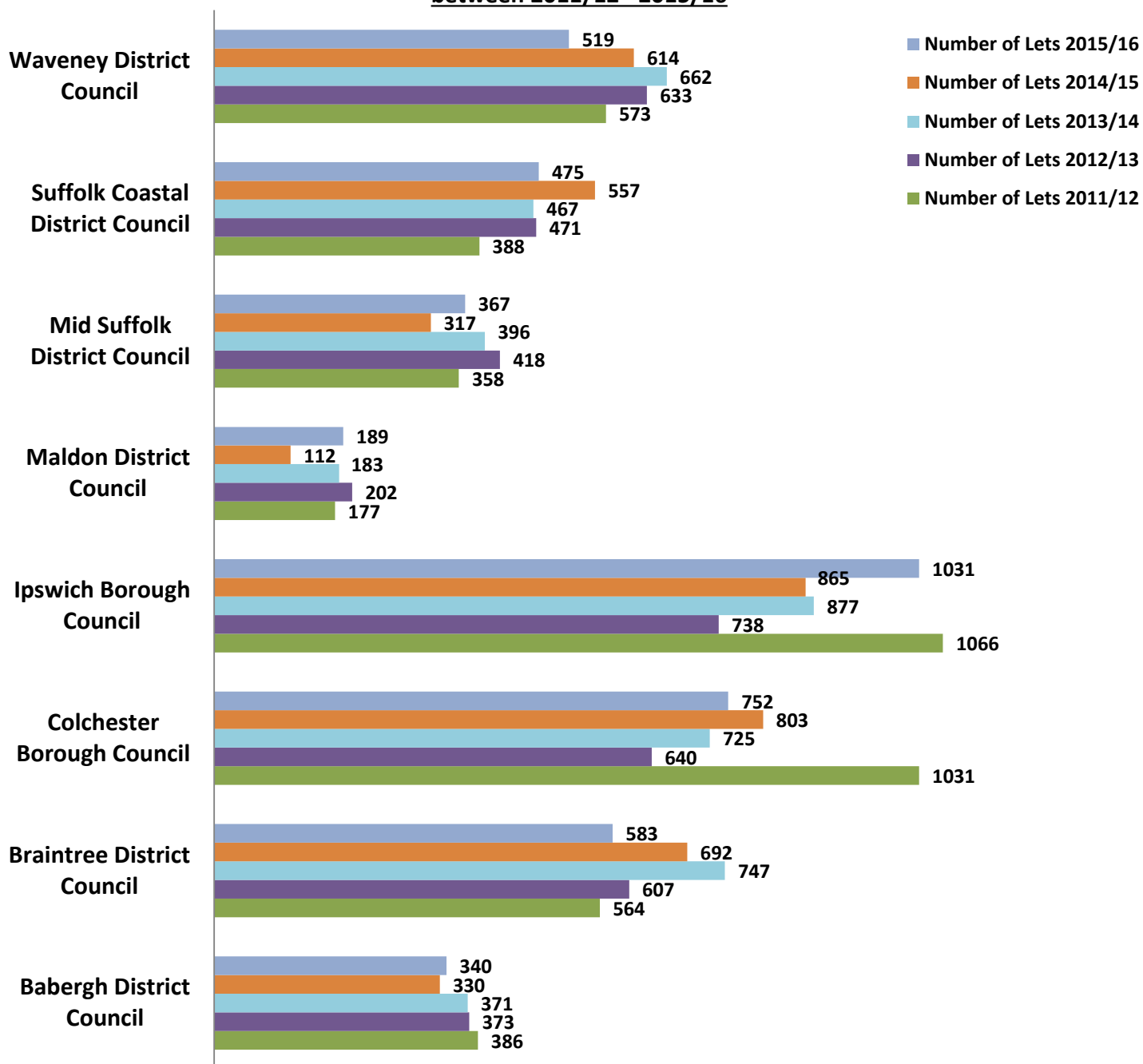
1. Number of properties let in each Local Authority through Gateway to Homechoice between 2011/12 & 2015/16

The number of properties that become available to let each year is affected by a number of factors but the main ones are:

- the number of rented social homes in the area *and*
- the number of new affordable homes let in that year.

The variations between the LAs reflects mainly the size of their social rented sector. For example, Colchester and Ipswich have the largest number of social homes, while Maldon has the smallest number. The changes from one year to the next within a local authority area usually reflect the variation in the number of new homes provided.

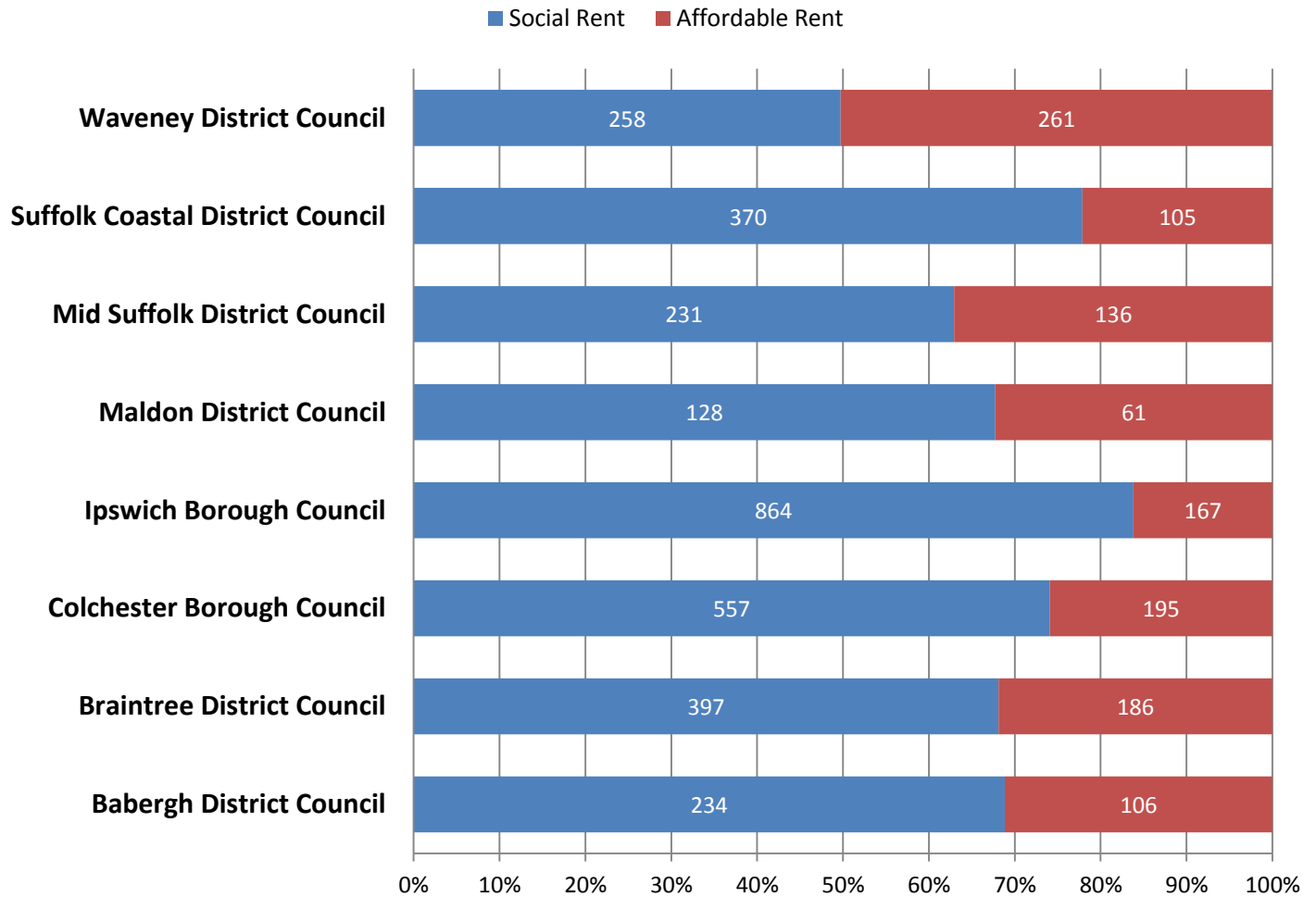
**Number of Properties Let in each Local Authority through Gateway to Homechoice
between 2011/12 - 2015/16**



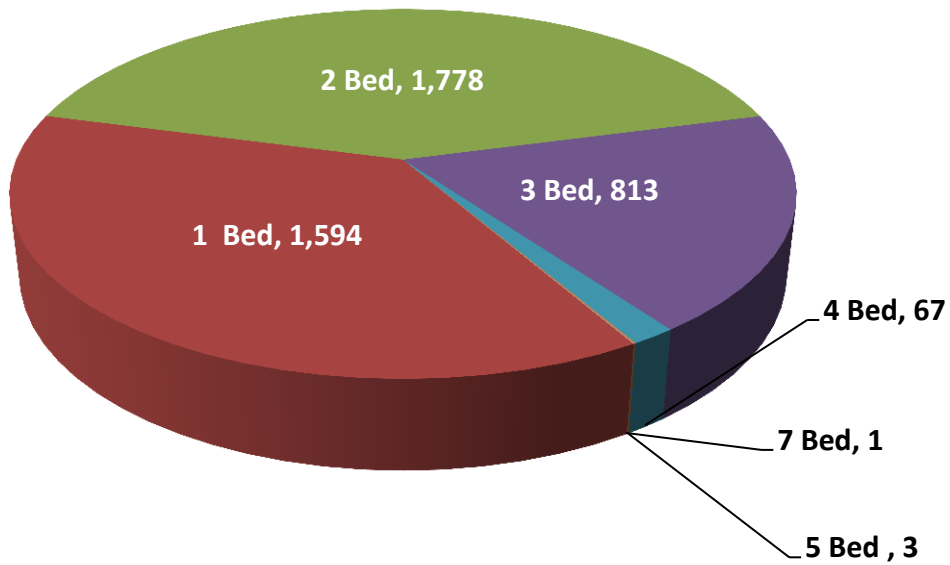
2. Total number of properties let in each Local Authority in 2015/16 split by type of tenancy

Social housing for rent can be let at social or affordable rent levels. Social rent is set using a formula that takes into account local earnings and house prices, while affordable rent is set at 80% of market rent. In general, affordable rents are higher than social rents and the gap between them is bigger for bigger properties.

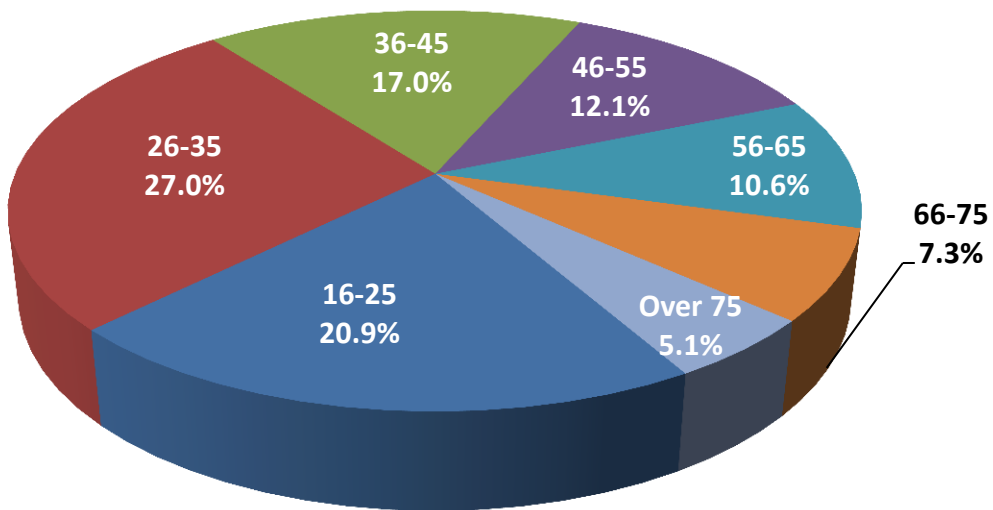
Affordable rents are usually charged for all **new** social housing. Some housing associations also 'convert' properties from social rent to affordable rent when properties become vacant. This raises money to invest in new affordable housing.



3. Total number of properties let in 2015/16 split by the bedroom size of the property



4. Proportion of property lettings in 2015/16 made through Gateway to Homechoice split by age of the main applicant

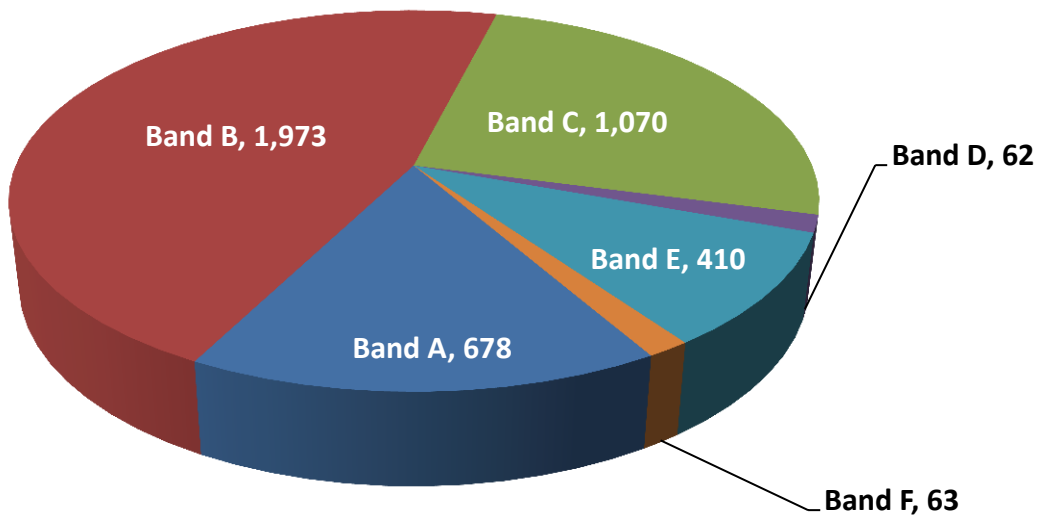


About 'Bands'

When someone applies for housing, the urgency of their application is assessed in line with the Allocations Policy, which can be viewed and downloaded from the scheme's web-site. Applications are placed in 'Bands' from A to F, depending on the level of need. The **main** categories of need for each band are summarised below. (Please look at the website if you want a complete guide to the banding scheme).

Band	Main categories of need
A	Critical medical/welfare award Downsizing from 3 bedroom or larger social housing property Nominations from supported housing providers with agreed move-on arrangements
B	Serious medical/welfare award Downsizing from 2 bed social housing property Accepted homeless cases and some cases where homelessness can be prevented Overcrowding in social or private rented housing
C	Moderate medical/welfare award Notice to quit Homeless households not in 'priority need' People sharing facilities with other households or lacking facilities
D	Applicants whose needs have been assessed as having a higher need but whose application has been given reduced preference. Examples include people with no local connection and households with a poor tenancy history (e.g. arrears, current or previous eviction action)
E	People with no immediate need to move
F	Applicants registering for schemes where qualification is based on an assessment of care needs (such as 'Extra Care' or 'Very sheltered' housing schemes).

5. Total number of properties let in 2015/16 made through Gateway to Homechoice split by the band awarded to the applicant



Types of Applicant

We split applicants into 3 categories:

Homeless applicants

Households that a local authority has accepted a legal duty to house. Most will be in temporary accommodation.

Transfer Applicants

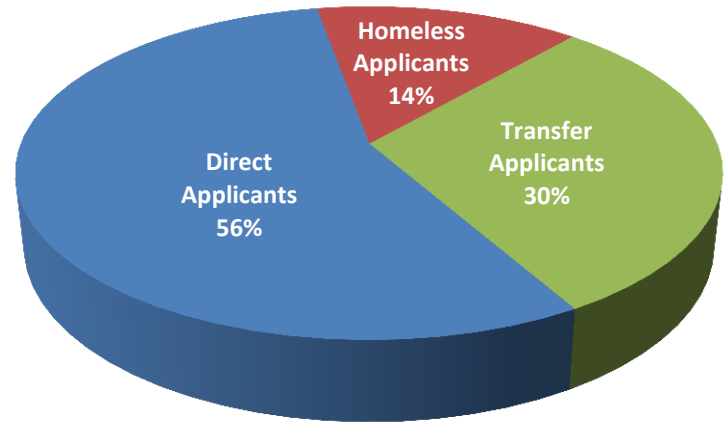
Council or housing association tenants seeking a move to another property.

Direct Applicants

All other applicants. The largest groups are people renting privately and people living with their family.

We want to house a reasonable balance between these groups. The scheme is designed to recognise how urgently people need to move, while meeting our legal duties and promoting a reasonable flow of properties.

6. Applicants housed in 2015/16 through Gateway to Homechoice split by applicant type

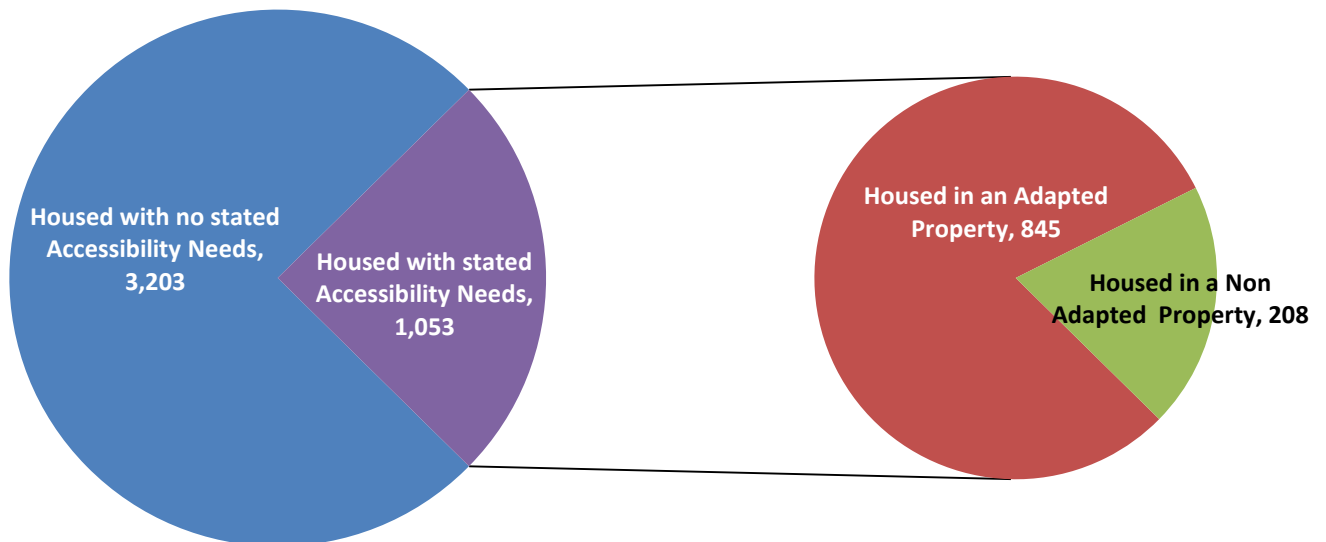


Accessibility and adaptations

Some disabled people need a home to have certain features for it to be suitable for them. Most commonly, people have limited mobility and need a property with level access (such as a bungalow or ground floor flat). It is also relatively common for people to need a level-access shower. A few people need a property adapted specifically for a wheelchair user.

We are committed to making sure that adapted homes are offered to people who need the adaptations in the property. We therefore operate a system where people identify their accessibility needs to us and if a suitable property becomes vacant, people needing the adaptations are given priority first.

7. Properties let through Gateway to Homechoice in 2015/16 to people with a stated accessibility need

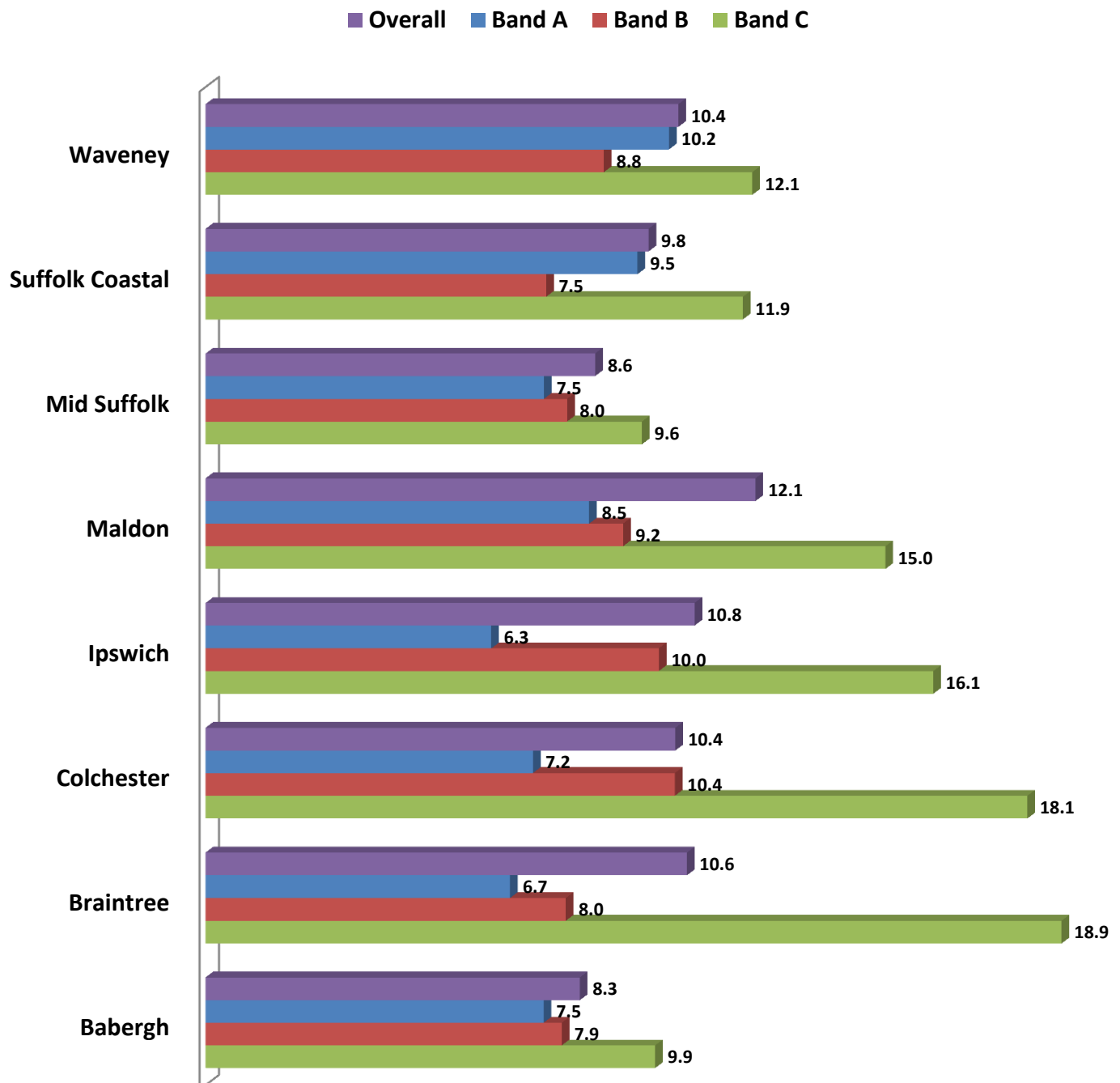


Waiting times

The table below shows the average waiting time (in months) for housing, broken down by the band of the applicant. It is measured by recording how long people have waited when they are housed.

Some people, such as those waiting for a smaller home, may choose to wait until a property becomes available in a specific area. Others, such as people in temporary accommodation, are more likely to take the first available vacancy. This is reflected in some of the figures, as people waiting for downsizing moves from larger family homes are in Band A, while homeless households are in Band B. The waiting times in some districts are therefore shorter in Band B than Band A.

8. Average waiting times in months of those housed through Gateway to Homechoice in 2015/16 split by Band



Household Movement

Households register with the District where they live (or where they want to live if they are from outside the area of the scheme). Once registered, they can 'bid' for housing in any of the 8 Local Authority areas.

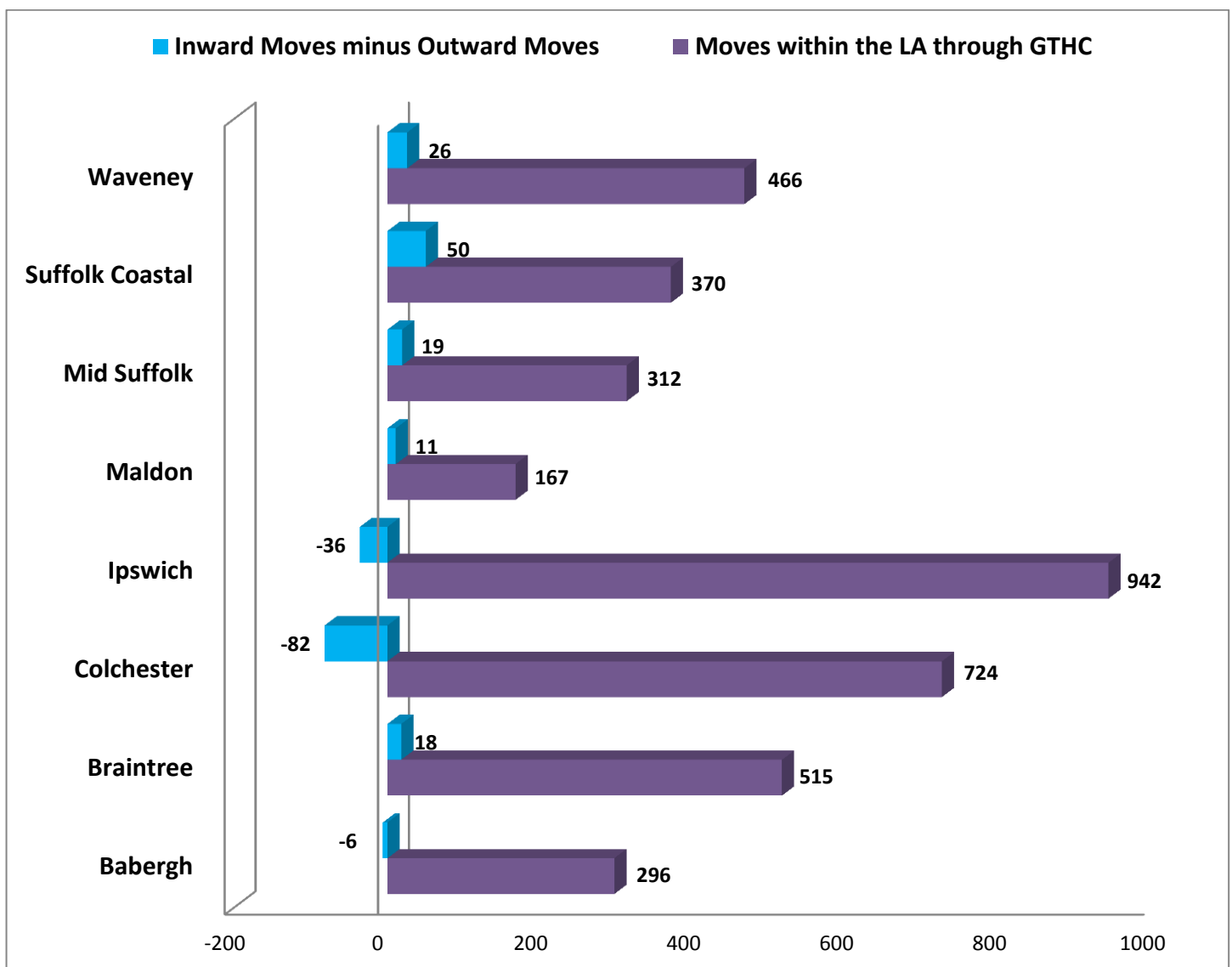
There are some exceptions to this policy. In particular:

- If a Council accepts a homeless duty to an applicant, the applicant will normally be restricted to bidding for housing in the area of that Council.
- New affordable housing is normally offered on first let to people with a connection to the local authority where it is built. On some rural sites, where there are s106 agreements, the local connection also applies each time they are relet.

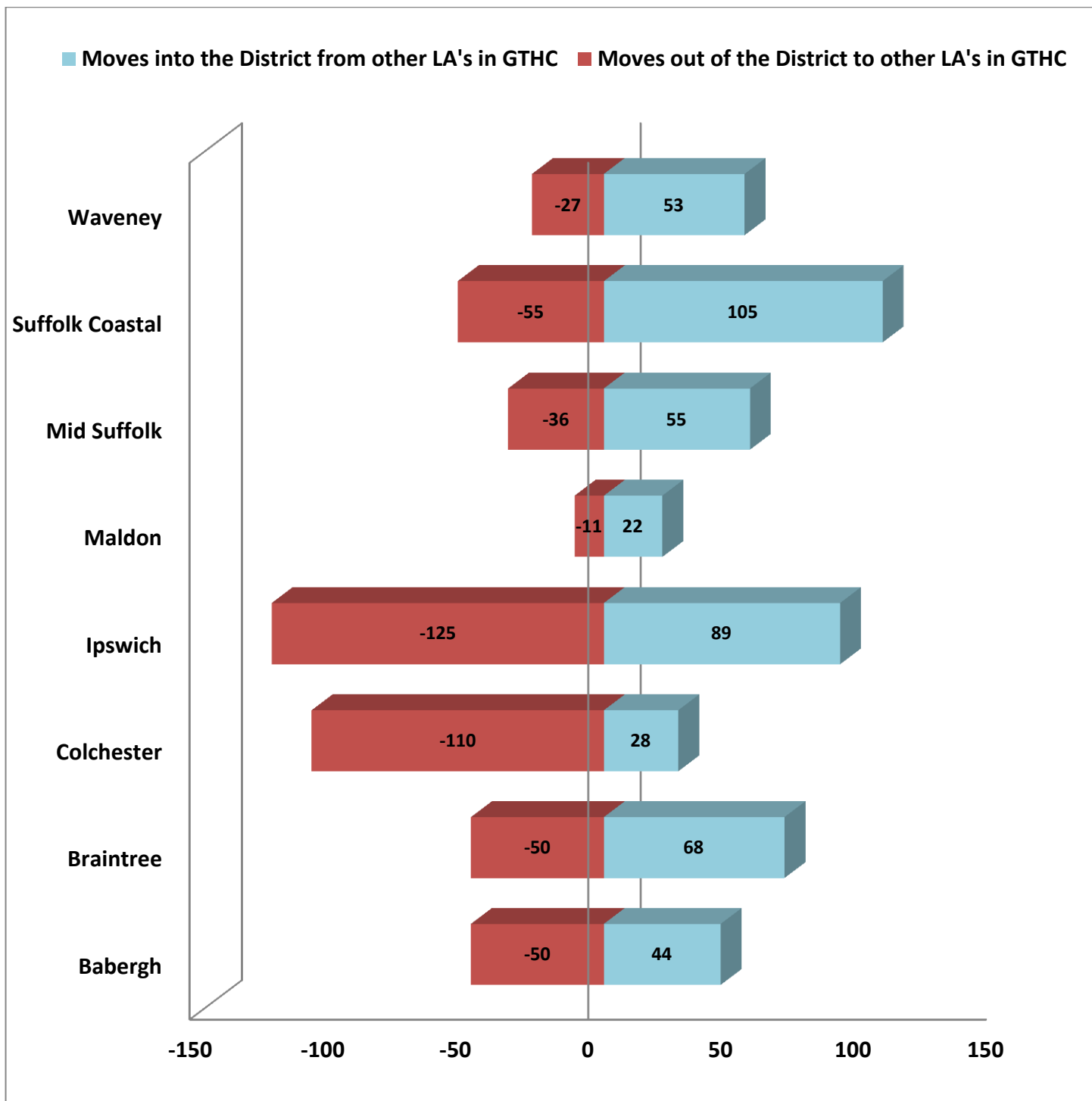
Imbalances between inward and outward movement can be controlled by advertising properties as available only for local residents for a period of time. This can be applied to specific property types, for example to 2 bed houses, so that a Council can restrict bidding until a better balance is reached.

The following tables show the extent of cross-boundary movement between the local authorities. Some of the people who move between districts may have a connection (for example through work or family) to the area they move to.

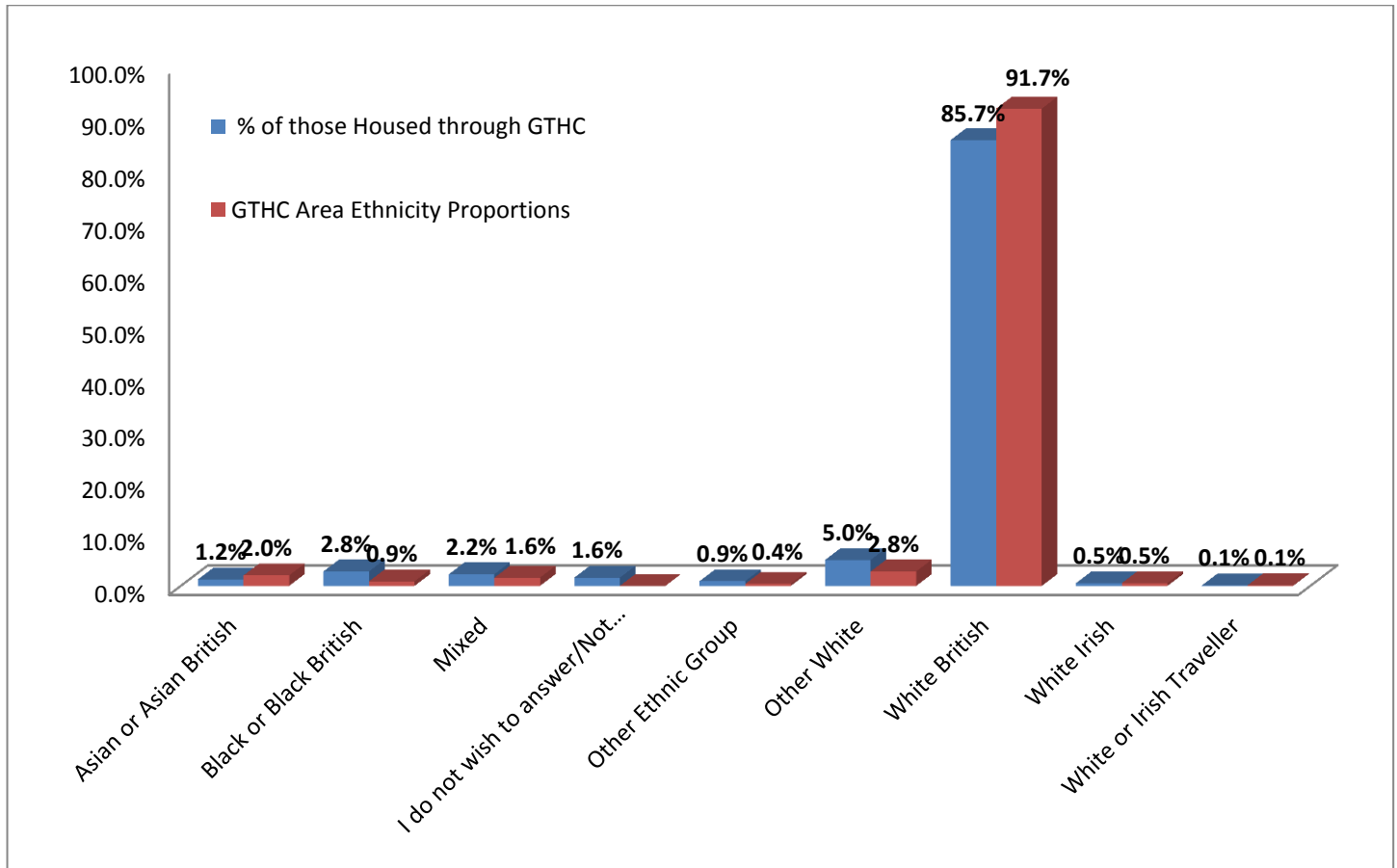
9. The movement of households housed through Gateway to Homechoice in 2015/16



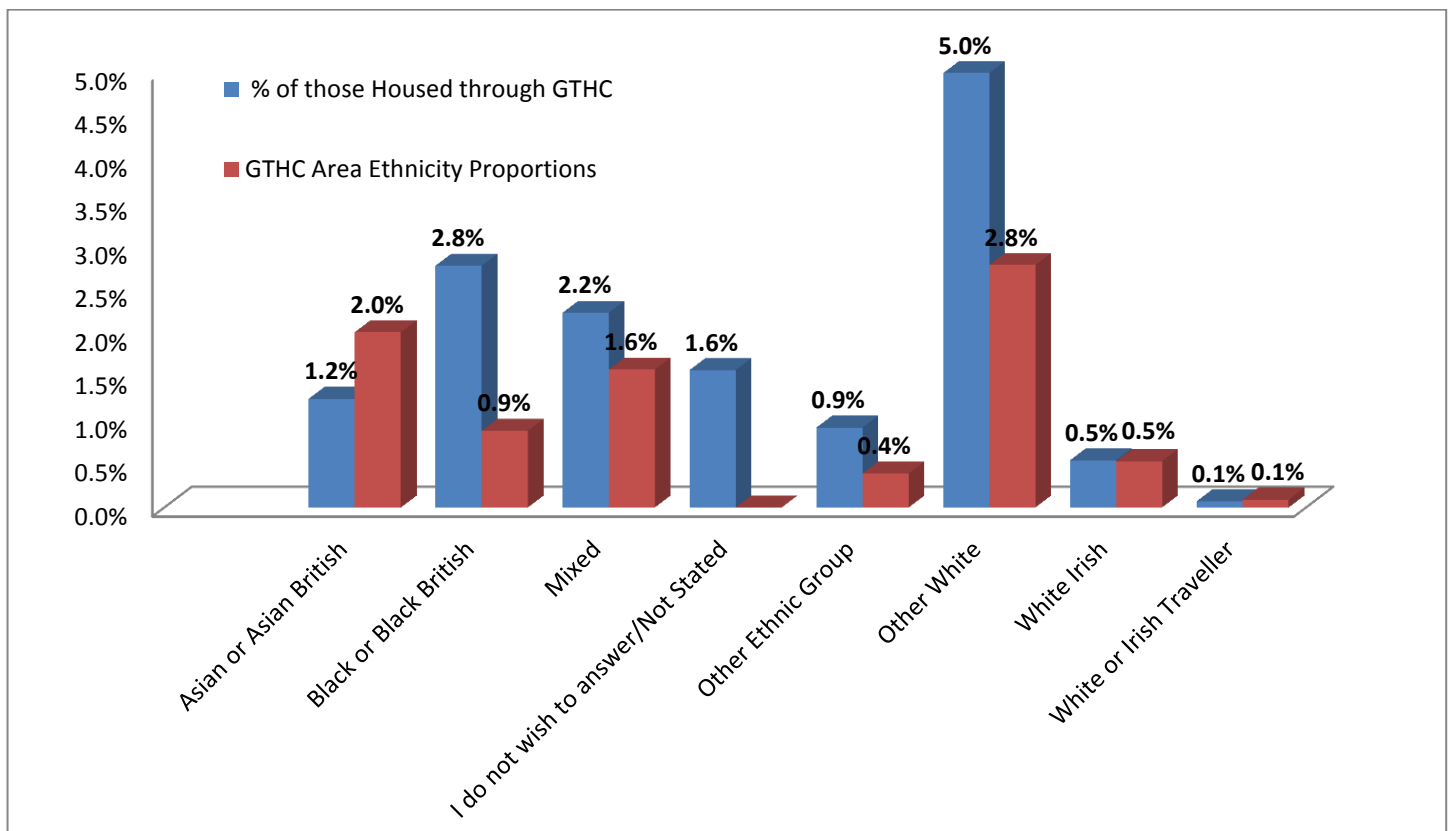
10. Details of the inward and outward movements between Districts of those housed through Gateway to Homechoice in 2015/16



11. Ethnic groups housed through Gateway to Homechoice in 2015/16 compared with overall ethnicity in the Gateway to Homechoice area.



As above but with the 'White British' ethnic group excluded.



12. Gateway to Homechoice Armed Forces data.

We give additional priority to people who have served in the armed forces.

When we consider an application from someone who has a history of service, we use the same criteria as when we band all other applicants. When households bid for a property, the household with a service history automatically comes above all the people in the same Band.

This means they are more likely to be housed than someone who has the same circumstances but has no history of service.

Note: Data in this section refers to the local authority (LA) where the applicant registered. Because applicants can move between LAs, totals here are likely to differ slightly from the number of property lettings in each LA in the tables at the beginning of this report.

Local Authority where applicant was registered	Households housed with Armed Forces priority in 2015/16	Total households housed through GTHC in 2015/16
Babergh District Council	9	346
Braintree District Council	17	565
Colchester Borough Council	55	834
Ipswich Borough Council	35	1067
Maldon District Council	4	178
Mid Suffolk District Council	16	348
Suffolk Coastal District Council	18	425
Waveney District Council	15	493
Grand Total	169	4256
Overall % Housed	4.0%	100.0%

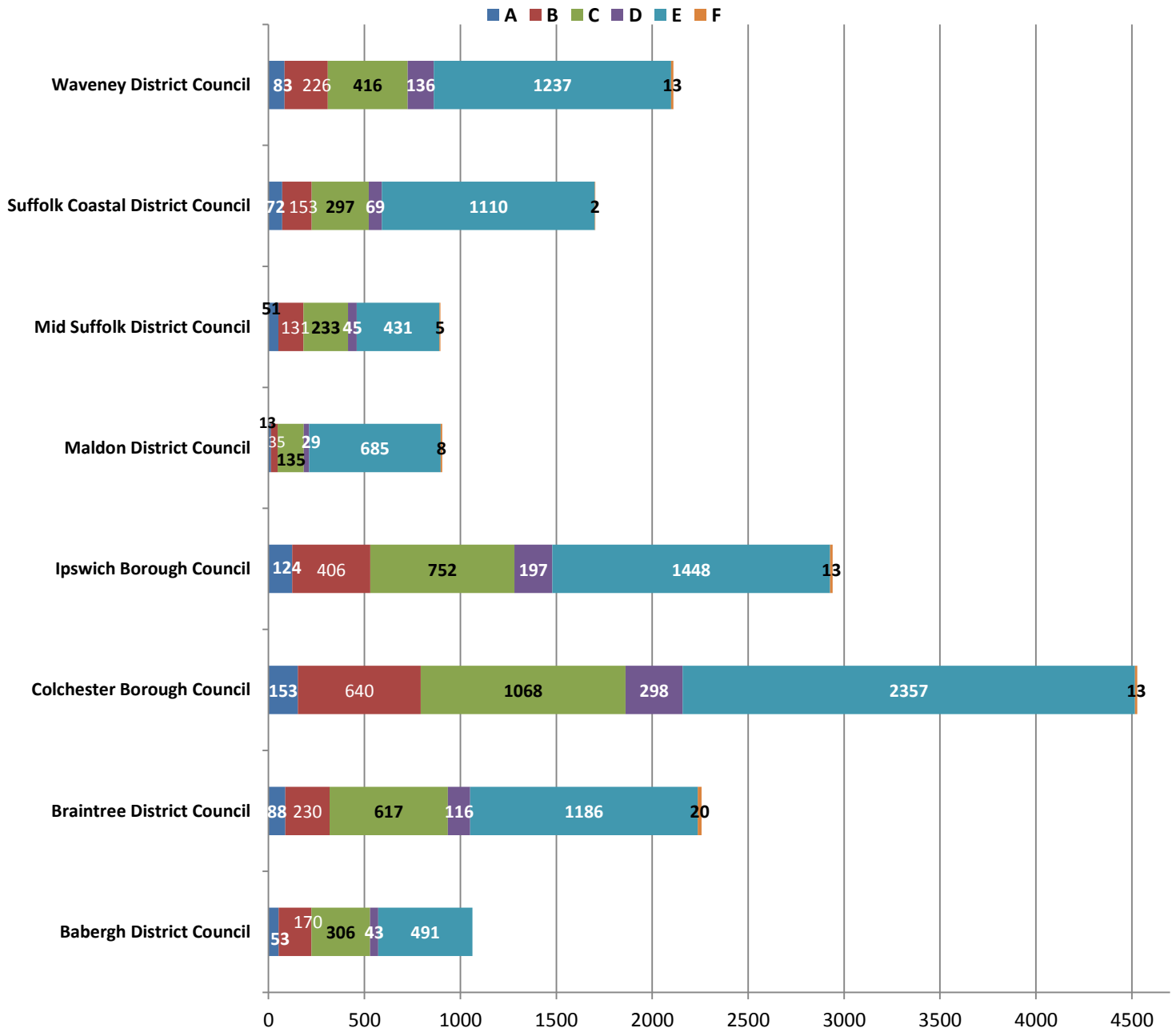
Local Authority where Applicant was registered	Active Applicants with Armed Forces Priority as at 09.05.16	Total Active Applicants as at 09.05.16
Babergh District Council	27	1063
Braintree District Council	45	2257
Colchester Borough Council	160	4529
Ipswich Borough Council	41	2940
Maldon District Council	10	905
Mid Suffolk District Council	30	896
Suffolk Coastal District Council	57	1703
Waveney District Council	30	2111
Grand Total	400	16,404
Overall % of Active Applicants	2.4%	100.0%

Priority Type	Overall Average Waiting Time in Months to be housed through GTHC in 2015/16
Households housed <u>with</u> Armed Forces Priority	6.6
Households housed with <u>no</u> Armed Forces Priority	11.3

13. Gateway to Homechoice Applicants data by band (as of 09.05.2016)

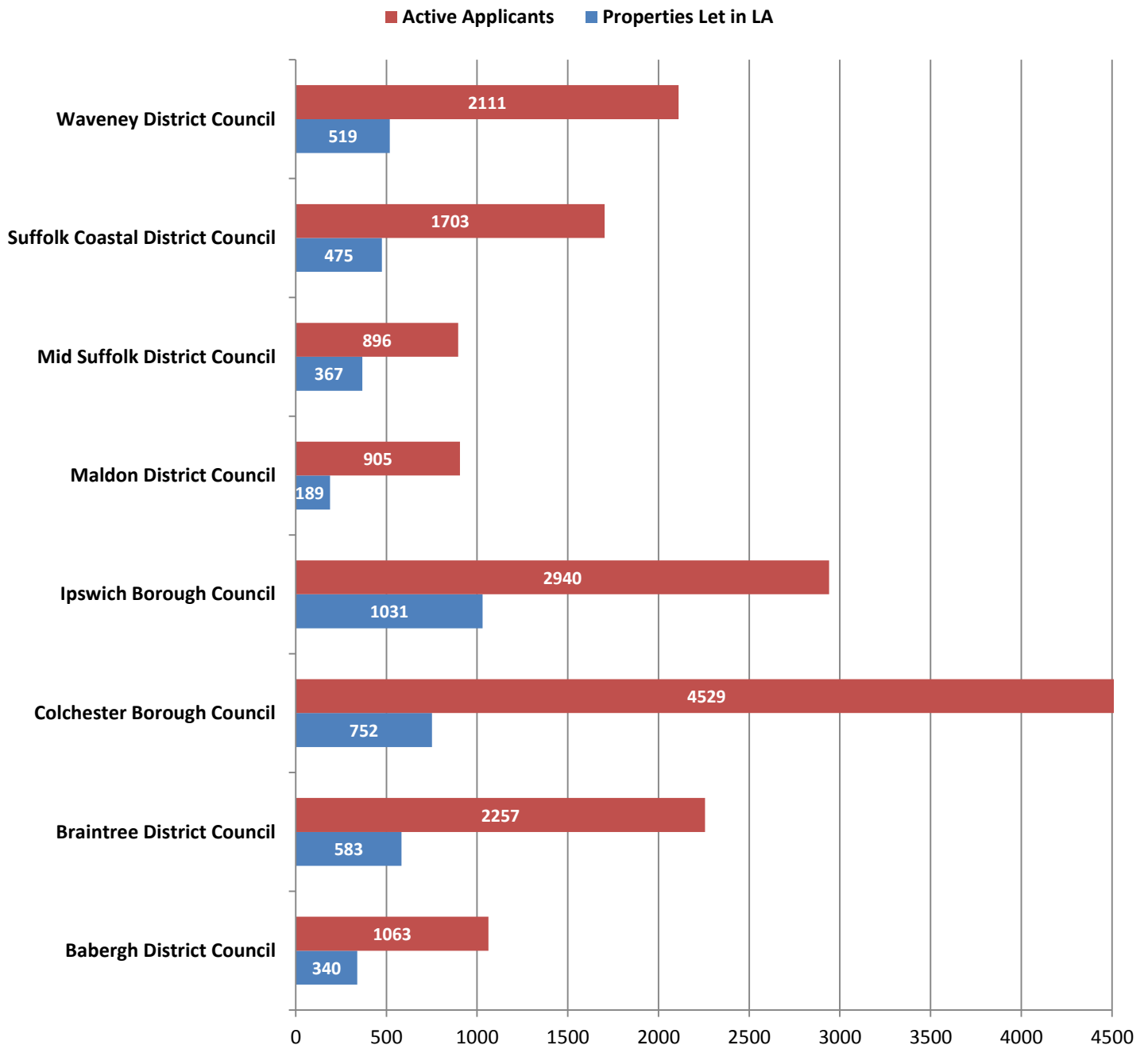
The number of applicants changes all the time as new people register and households move into accommodation or do not renew their application. New applicant numbers are therefore a 'snapshot' at a particular point in time. All of the data for the report so far has related to the households that have been housed through the scheme and mainly looks back at the year from April 2015 to March 2016. The data below relates to people waiting to be housed. The report from which this was generated was taken on 09th May 2016.

The chart shows the number in each Band, in each Local Authority.



14. Gateway to Homechoice Applicants Data (as of 09.05.2016) compared to the total number of properties let in each Local Authority area in 2015/16.

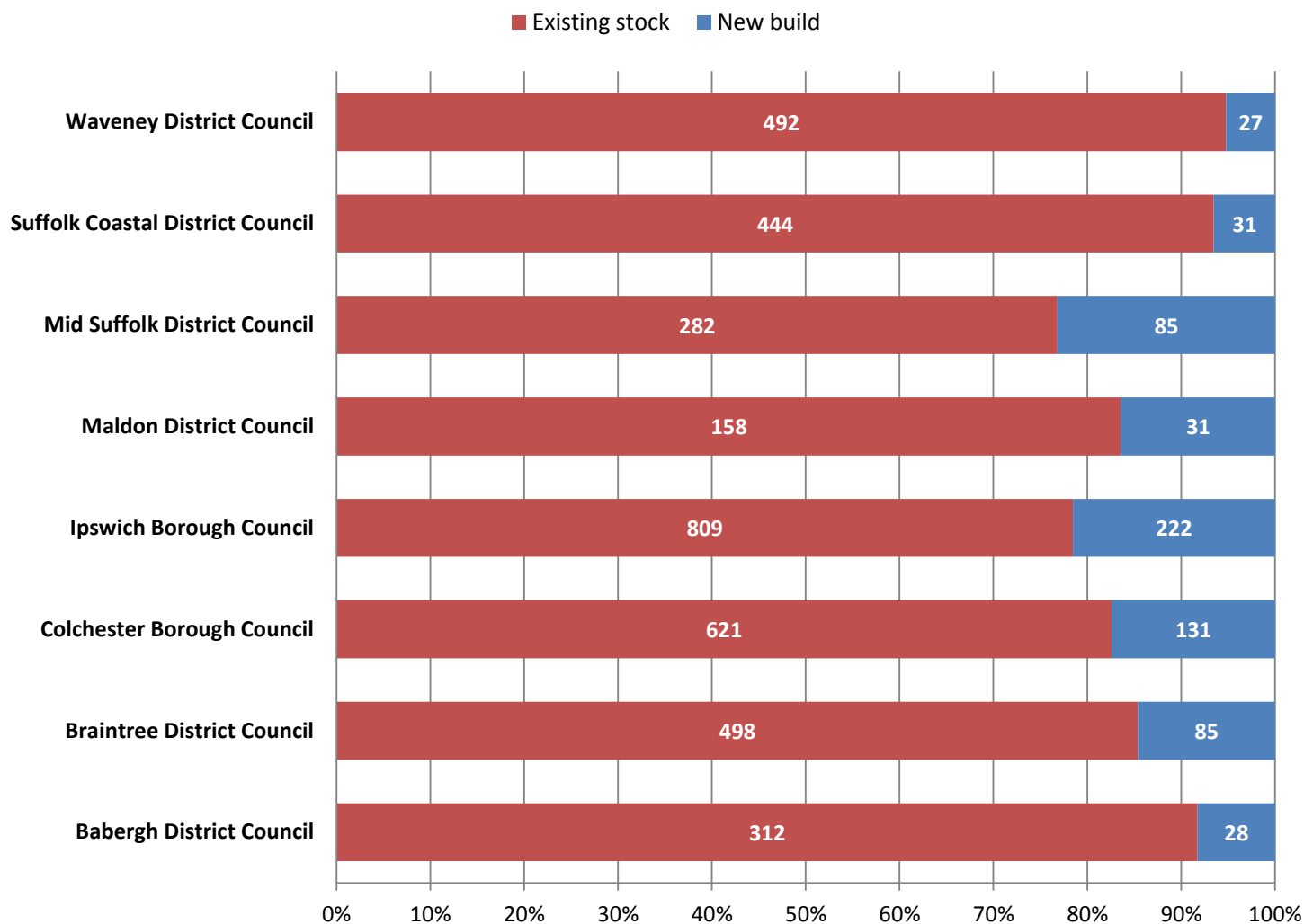
The data below compares the number of registered applicants on 09 May 2016 with the number of lettings made during the previous financial year 2015/16.



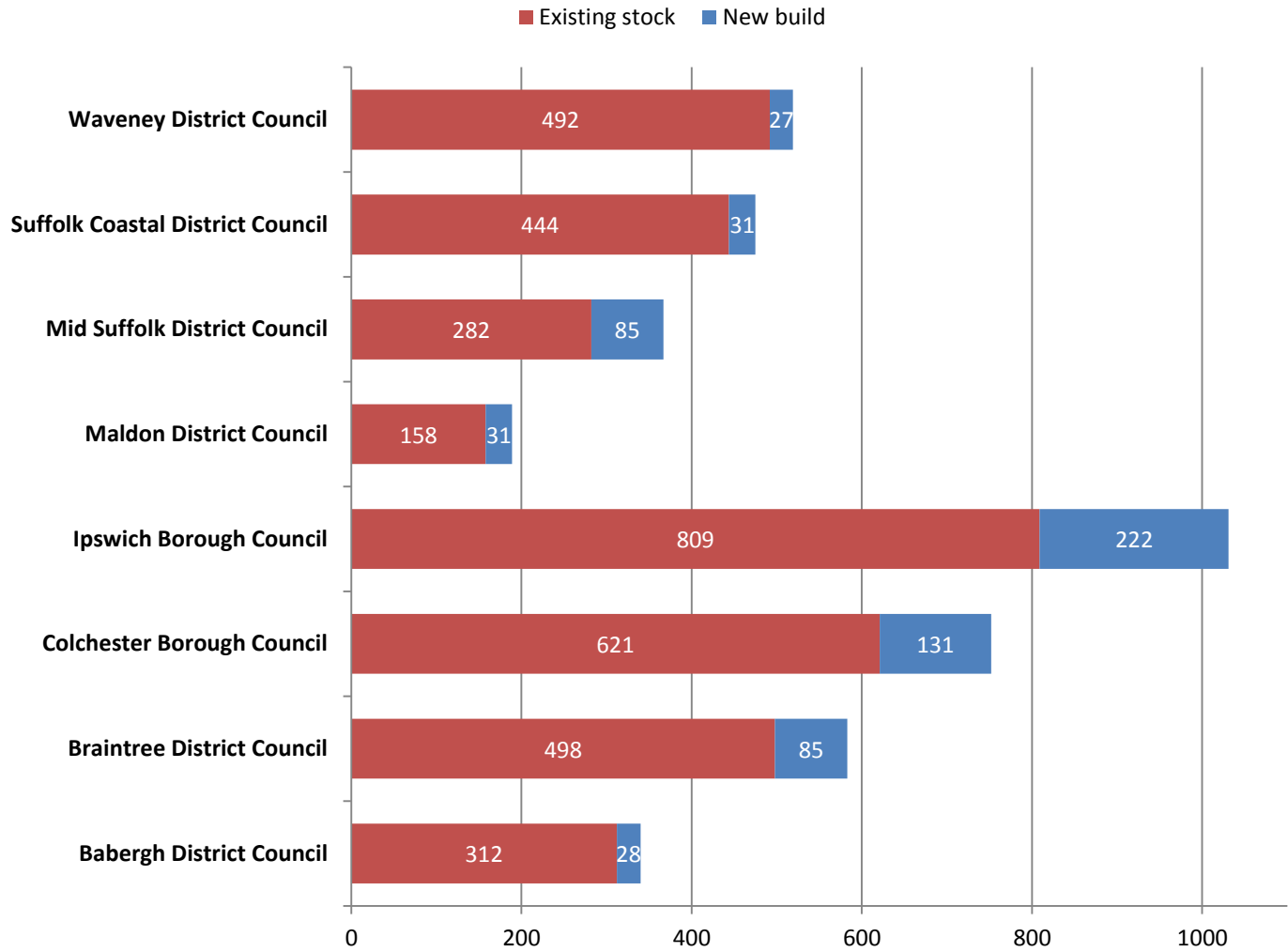
15. Comparison of the proportion of new and existing properties let in each Local Authority in 2015/16

All of the charts so far have been updates to information produced a year ago. This allows direct comparison from one year to the next. The chart below and on the next pages are new items. The first two charts compare new lets of housing with lets of existing properties.

New affordable housing can make a really significant difference to the overall number of homes available. As shown below, more than 20% of the affordable housing let in both Mid Suffolk and Ipswich last year were new-build homes.

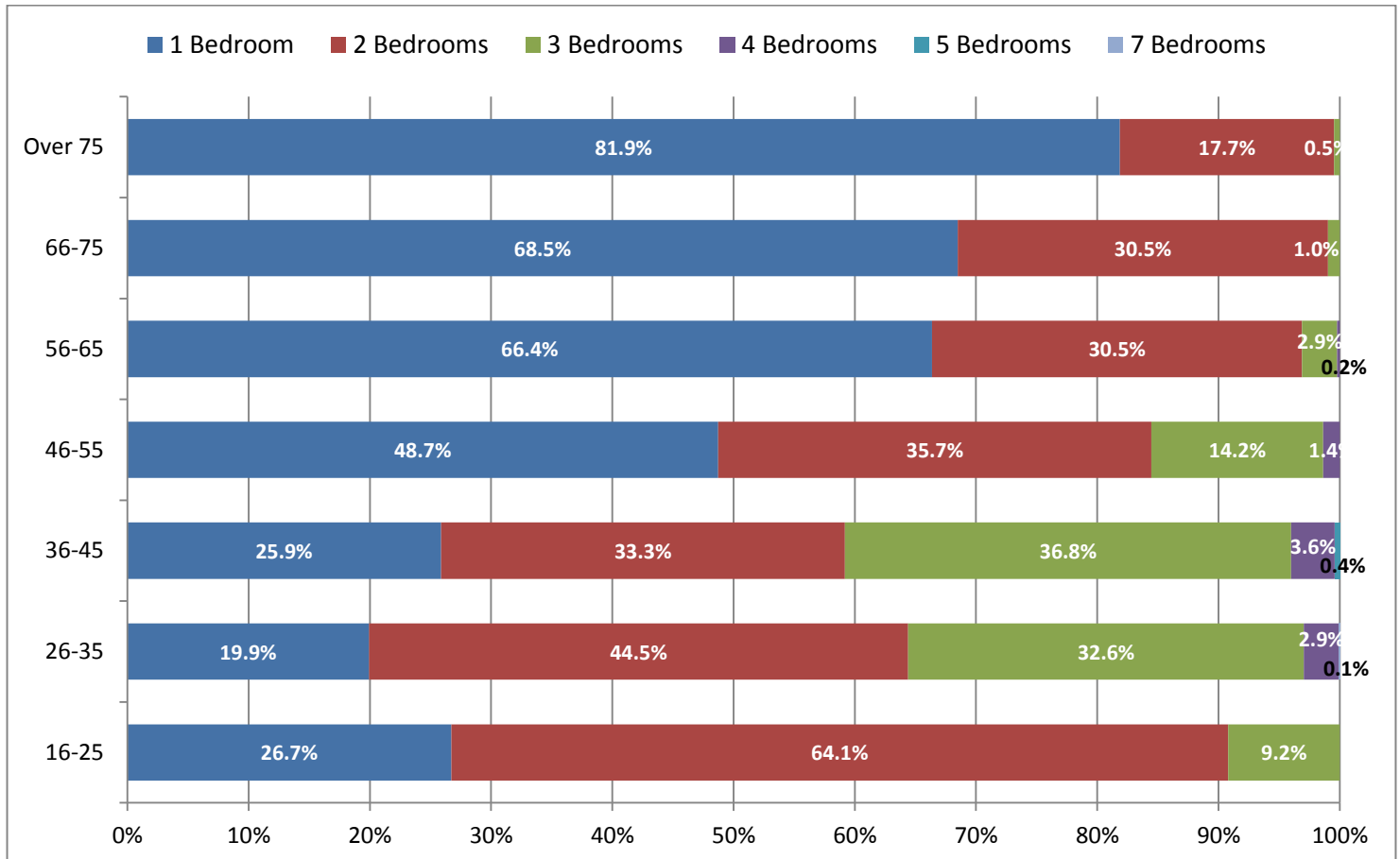


16. Total number of properties let in each Local Authority in 2015/16 split by new and existing stock



17. The proportion of lets made in the Gateway to Homechoice area in 2015/16 split by the number of bedrooms in the property and the primary applicant's age group

Changes to benefit regulations can make a big difference on how housing is let. Under current regulations, under 35s taking up a new tenancy from April 2016 could run into financial problems in 2018 if they need to claim benefits to pay their rent. This is because the amount of benefit they can claim will be limited from 2018 to the Local Housing Allowance rate for shared accommodation that would apply to a private sector property. In most areas, this is less than the rent on a self-contained one-bed flat. Understanding the current balance of lettings helps us to plan future policy



Policy Changes and upgraded IT system

During 2016, we updated our Allocations Policy to include priority to social housing tenants moving to be near to their work. This is called 'Right to Move', a Government Policy intended to help people move to secure work or to reduce the hardship of people already in work but where travelling causes serious issues for them.

We will report on the outcome of the change of policy in next year's report.

Local Government Ombudsman Report In 2014/15 the Ombudsman received 978 complaints across England and Wales about housing allocations, which is a 13% increase on the previous year. A significant number of complaints received were over applicants being removed from housing registers as they no longer met new Local Authority rules. In particular, many Local Authorities introduced requirements that people live or have lived in the area for several years before they can join the housing register. So far, we have decided not to implement such a system.

We are upgrading our IT system and from November 2016 we will be able to report on how long new applicants have lived in our districts. We will include data about this in next year's report.

Future Data Requests

If there is something you would like to see reported on now or in the future, please contact the Gateway to Homechoice co-ordinator, Claire Beckett claire.beckett@cbhomes.org.uk