Fundamental review of
Social Housing Allocations
Analysis of Analytical Services Unit Research
Paper: Social Housing Waiting List

1. Background

1.1   Housing, Urban Regeneration and Local Government Group (HUR&LG) in the
       Department for Communities commissioned Analytical Services Unit (ASU) to
       produce descriptive multivariate statistics on average waiting times for social
       housing for applicants according to their age, religion, and the presence of
       dependants in the household.

1.2   ASU used NIHE waiting list and allocations data from 4 July 2011 to 11 May 2016 to
       examine:
       - waiting times for applicants still on the waiting list; and
       - waiting times at the point of allocation for tenants who were allocated a
         home.

**1.3   The data provided simply allows measurement of waiting time against a small
       number of defined factors. Therefore the consideration of any wider factors, such
       as levels of housing supply (either new stock or re-lets of existing stock), were
       outside the scope of the project.**

1.4   The findings are contained in a separate report available at www.communities-
       ni.gov.uk/allocations-review. The ASU report provides further detail on the method
       used to produce the statistics.

1.5   In finalising the report, stakeholders identified the need for the wider housing
   context to be explained, which has resulted in this paper.

2. Scope

2.1   This paper reflects HUR&LG's policy analysis of the ASU report. It provides some
       additional context and represents the data visually. It is important to note that:

       - **This analysis cannot address the question of which of the three key variables
         – age, religion, or dependency – has any influence, or the greatest influence,
         on waiting times.**

       - Within each of these groups there is likely to be considerable variability
         attached to other factors such as housing supply and socio-economic and

cultural factors, which may impact on applicants' ability or willingness to be flexible in order to access a reasonable property.

2.2   Unlike ASU's report, this analysis focuses only on <u>those households who have been allocated a social home</u>. The reason for this is that, based on ASU's report, it appears that those on the waiting list, and those allocated a home, in combination do not represent a homogeneous group.

2.3   The vast majority of allocations (approximately 89%) go to households in housing stress (i.e. with more than 30 points).[1] In contrast, approximately 40% of the waiting list consists of households not in housing stress (approximately 15,000 of the 37,500 households on the waiting list, based on 2015/16 figures).[2]

2.4   This can be seen from the analysis undertaken by ASU. Tables 3a and 3b in Annex A of ASU's report show that households who did not receive an allocation had the following points profile, with approximately 60% in housing stress:

Points awards among households still on waiting list

Legend:
- 0 points
- 1-29 points
- 30-69 points
- 70-99 points
- 100-199 points
- 200+ points

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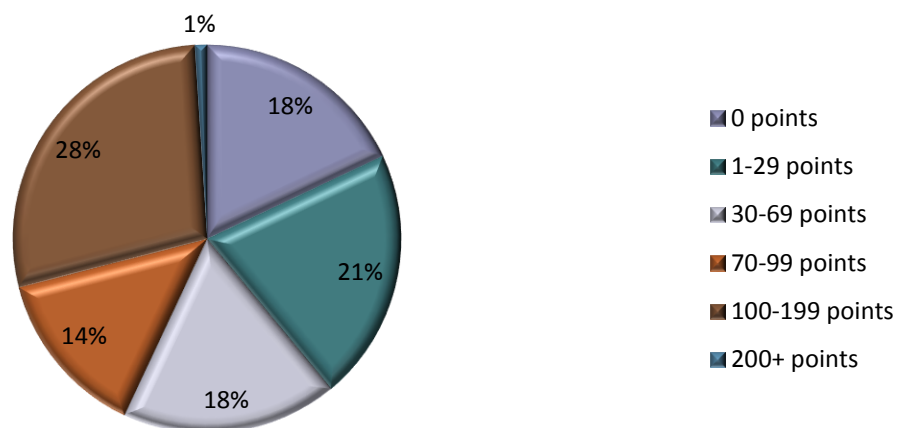
[1] University of Ulster & University of Cambridge Research to inform a fundamental review of social housing allocations policy (December 2013), report 1, page 74, Table 5 www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dsd/social-housing-allocations-report1.pdf
[2] Department for Communities Northern Ireland Housing Statistics, table 3.5 www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-housing-statistics-2015-16

2.5   In contrast, among households who received an allocation, the points profile was as
        follows, with 92% in housing stress:

Points awards among households allocated
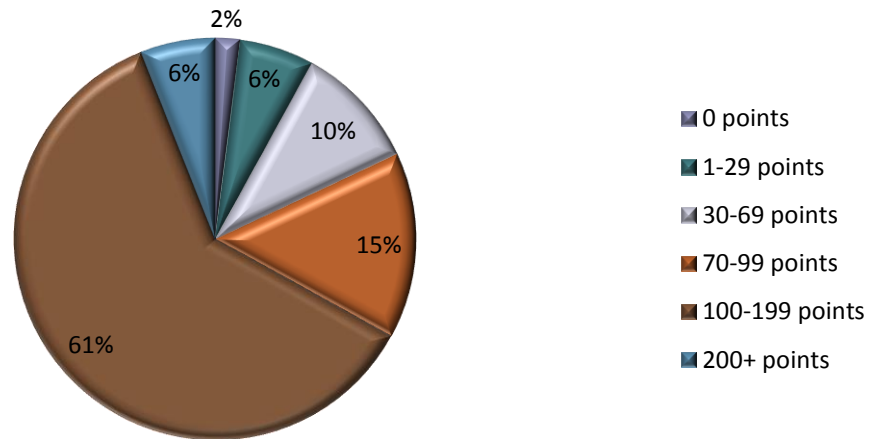
2.6   If resources permit, there may be an opportunity for further analysis specifically of
        waiting times for those on the waiting list in housing stress. This may be a useful
        comparison to the findings below, which refer to those who have been allocated a
        social home.

3. Interpretation

3.1   Caution must be applied when considering data on allocations, as:

    • **the availability or supply of properties is unpredictable in most cases**. While
      the Social Housing Development Programme provides a planned programme
      of new build social housing each year, the majority of vacancies usually arise
      in existing stock;
    • importantly, **social housing applicants can choose the areas in which they
      wish to live**, so demand may be high in areas where the turnover of homes is
      low and vice versa;
    • the **demographics of different population groups may also impact** on the
      availability of properties.

3.2   In their Equality Impact Assessment on the Housing Selection Scheme in 2007 the
        NIHE stated:

> *"As the Housing Selection Scheme Policy addresses specific housing needs in
> Northern Ireland it affects some groups more than others; equally, the response
> to the needs of some groups when compared to others can be different...**This
> difference is, however, as a consequence of the applicant's needs (i.e.
> household needs) and not their equality status."* [3]

3.3   Dr Alison Wallace's report on Housing and Communities' Inequalities in Northern
        Ireland points out:

> *"In Northern Ireland residential segregation on religious grounds, not least in
> social housing, means dual markets operate in close proximity and yet
> properties may not be substitutable for each other.*
>
> *Residents may feel unsafe in another neighbourhood, or as a study in locations
> outside Belfast suggests, people's residential preferences are also influenced by
> the location of family, friends and a sense of belonging rather than historical
> tensions (Young et al., 2012).*
>
> *In some areas, there may be less pressure on social housing due to lower
> market costs and private rents or due to the composition of local households.*
>
> *Furthermore, relative ease of access to homes in some locations may also mean
> that a lower quality of accommodation is obtained, as some less desirable
> properties and/or neighbourhoods have a high turnover of residents and
> therefore produce a higher rate of relets (NIHE, 2011).*
>
> *In some places, therefore, local demand for social housing can be adequately
> met with relets arising from within the current stock of social housing
> properties.*
>
> *In other places, new social housing supply is needed to supplement the relet
> opportunities and thus make inroads into the waiting lists.*
>
> ***The key constraint on social housing lets in Northern Ireland is that excess
> demand in one area cannot easily be met by excess supply in another**."*[4]

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[3] NIHE (2007), Final Report Equality Impact Assessment of the Housing Selection Scheme, paragraph 3.11 at
http://www.nihe.gov.uk/final_report_-_equality_impact_assessment_of_the_housing_selection_scheme.pdf
[4] Alison Wallace (2015), *Housing and Communities' Inequalities in NI* at
http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/HousingInequalities-
FullReport.pdf, pp81-82.

3.4   The findings below reflect a snapshot of allocations over a defined period of time. It should be noted that:

- **Some key variables are missing from the findings, namely:**
  - **The points profile of allocated households (i.e. their level of housing need);**
  - **The level of demand in households' areas of choice;**
  - **The supply of suitable housing in those areas.**

- **Relying solely on quantitative data has limitations: a more qualitative approach could investigate reasons for household choices, especially where supply is limited, and provide a fuller picture that may explain or contextualise the data.**

4. Method

4.1   At HUR&LG's request, ASU provided some further means not shown in the original tables provided. These were used to create a table of means.

4.2   It should be noted that:

- **the mean is the arithmetic average and as a statistic can often be unreliable, having been skewed by significant outliers, i.e. applicants who have been on the waiting list for many years; the median (a measure of central tendency) is a more reliable indicator, as it is not affected by outliers to the same degree;**
- **in general, the median measure is the more meaningful and reflective of the experience of the applicant.**

4.3   ASU's analysis shows both the mean and the median. In this paper, to produce a table of means, it has been necessary to only use **mean** waiting times.

4.4   An Excel filter was applied to the mean waiting times to produce heat maps. This allows a visual representation of the different waiting times across a large number of multiple identity groups.

4.5   Bubble charts were also created to examine each set of results. These allow a further visual representation of how the different identities (age / dependants / religion) combine with regard to waiting times.

5. Results

5.1   The table below shows **mean** waiting times at point of allocation for each subgroup.

5.2   The data can be presented to show results by age, presence of dependants, and religion (see tables at Annex A).

5.3   The tables are heat maps: warmer colours (red / orange / yellow) indicate shorter waiting times and the cooler colours (green / blue) indicate longer waiting times.

Table 1: Mean number of days on the waiting list for those allocated a home (regardless of level of housing need / points awarded under the Housing Selection Scheme)

		All ages	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
All Applicants	**All religions**	545	370	564	553	599	600	585
	Catholics	640	471	686	646	670	653	614
	Protestants	477	321	459	479	534	555	587
	Mixed / Other	574	353	539	590	664	608	668
	None / Refused / Unknown	473	315	486	449	551	586	474
Dependants	**All religions**	594	410	614	581	677	832	935
	Catholics	705	529	756	662	733	914	721
	Protestants	477	333	448	495	604	761	1010
	Mixed / Other	617	332	555	618	790	878	984
	None / Refused / Unknown	517	310	512	495	645	764	1039
No Dependants	**All religions**	511	342	501	519	550	564	577
	Catholics	579	409	555	621	628	612	612
	Protestants	476	313	469	463	491	526	576
	Mixed / Other	544	365	521	552	568	549	662
	None / Refused / Unknown	451	317	464	410	499	560	466

5.4   There are some visible differences, for example 16-24 year olds who have been allocated a home generally appear to have experienced shorter average waiting times, people with dependants appear to have experienced longer average waiting times (especially as the age of the main applicant increases) and across the subgroups, Catholic households have generally experienced longer waiting times than other religious groups.

5.5 The extent of these differences can be seen in the table below, which shows how far each subgroup's average mean differs from the overall mean. So, for example, it can be seen in the top row of data that on average, 16-24 year old applicants of all religions have experienced waiting times of 175 days less than the overall average, while 25-34 year old applicants have, on average, experienced waiting times of 19 days longer than the overall average.

Table 2: Variance of the mean for each subgroup from the overall mean

		All ages	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
All Applicants	**All religions**	0	-175	19	8	54	55	40
	Catholics	95	-74	141	101	125	108	69
	Protestants	-68	-224	-86	-66	-11	10	42
	Mixed / Other	29	-192	-6	45	119	63	123
	None / Refused / Unknown	-72	-230	-59	-96	6	41	-71
Dependants	**All religions**	49	-135	69	36	132	287	390
	Catholics	**160**	-16	211	117	188	369	176
	Protestants	-68	-212	-97	-50	59	216	465
	Mixed / Other	72	-213	10	73	245	333	439
	None / Refused / Unknown	-28	-235	-33	-50	100	219	494
No Dependants	**All religions**	-34	-203	-44	-26	5	19	32
	Catholics	**34**	-136	10	76	83	67	67
	Protestants	-69	-232	-76	-82	-54	-19	31
	Mixed / Other	-1	-180	-24	7	23	4	117
	None / Refused / Unknown	-94	-228	-81	-135	-46	15	-79

5.6 Combined, both tables indicate that, based on average waiting times:

- Across all ages, Catholic households **without** dependants waited slightly longer (34 days) than other religious groups, while those **with** dependants waited substantially longer (160 days);
- **Younger** Protestant households experienced shorter waiting times than the overall average, while **older** Protestant households experienced longer waiting times;
- Mixed / Other religion households generally experienced longer waiting times than the average;

- Households who recorded their religion as None/Refused/Unknown experienced broadly similar trends to the Protestant households, i.e. shorter waiting times among **younger** households, and longer waiting times among **older** households;
- In respect of age, waiting times were on the whole shortest for the 16-24 age group, and almost always increased as the age of the applicant increased;
- In respect of dependants, waiting times for those with dependants were longer than those without, across all religious groups.

5.7 **While patterns may be visible, it is not possible to draw any direct conclusions from this data.** Each subgroup above could be further broken down by:

- their level of housing need;
- their area of choice;
- level of demand in that area;
- availability of stock of the required size, and so on.

5.8 Even then, quantitative data cannot reveal individual household motivations for area of choice or other decisions (such as refusal of reasonable offers) which may influence waiting times.

5.9 To illustrate the information in the tables above, listed below are the 10 multiple identity groups with the shortest, and longest, waiting times.

Table 3: The ten lowest mean waiting times

Waiting Time in days	Religion	Age	Dependants	Number of applicants
310	Refused /Unknown/ None	16-24	YES	201
313	Protestant	16-24	NO	1792
317	Refused /Unknown/ None	16-24	NO	508
332	Mixed / Other	16-24	YES	95
333	Protestant	16-24	YES	1112
365	Mixed/Other	16-24	NO	176
409	Catholic	16-24	NO	901
410	Refused /Unknown/ None	35-44	NO	449
448	Protestant	25-34	YES	2382
463	Protestant	35-44	NO	1363

Table 4: The ten highest mean waiting times

Waiting Time in days	Religion	Age	Dependants	Number of applicants
733	Catholic	45-54	YES	904
756	Catholic	25-34	YES	3400
761	Protestant	55-64	YES	213
764	RUN	55-64	YES	65
790	Mixed/Other	45-54	YES	201
878	Mixed/Other	55-64	YES	56
914	Catholics	55-64	YES	205
984	Mixed/Other	65+	YES	5
1010	Protestant	65+	YES	62
1039	RUN	65+	YES	8

5.10   It can be seen that:

- shorter waiting times are dominated by the 16-24 age group;
- longer waiting times are dominated by older age groups and those with dependants;
- Both the shorter and longer waiting times at table 2 feature all four religious groupings in both tables, although:
  - the only 16-24 age grouping not to appear in the shortest waiting time list is Catholic applicants with dependants, and
  - the only age grouping under 45 to appear in the longest waiting time list is that of Catholics aged 25-34 with dependants.

5.11   It is also notable that the number of applicants differ between tables 3 and 4:

- the shortest waiting times generally feature multiple identity groups numbering in the hundreds, or thousands (over 9,000 applicants in total across the ten groups);
- the longest waiting times generally feature groups which are smaller in number (with the exception of Catholic households aged 25-34), and which are therefore more likely to be distorted by the housing needs or behaviour of a smaller number of applicants (over 5,000 applicants in total across the ten groups).

5.12   This suggests the need for a further visual representation that illustrates the size of each subgroup alongside the average waiting times.

5.13   To place this in context, the bubble chart below shows mean waiting times for **all** allocated households in the dataset, **based on their points award under the Housing Selection Scheme.** The time waiting for an allocation is shown against points to give an indication of the speed of allocation for those in varying levels of housing need.

5.14   The centre of a bubble indicates mean waiting time, so the higher up the bubble is, the greater the number of days on the waiting list. The bigger the bubble is, the greater the size of that grouping.

5.15   The chart shows that applicants with 200 points or more (of which there were 2,197 in total) experienced a wait of, on average, **521** days before being allocated a home. Applicants with 100-199 points (of which there were 23,821 in total) waited **586** days on average. Shorter average waiting times were experienced by those applicants with lower points: the 953 applicants with zero points waited the shortest time (**421** days on average).
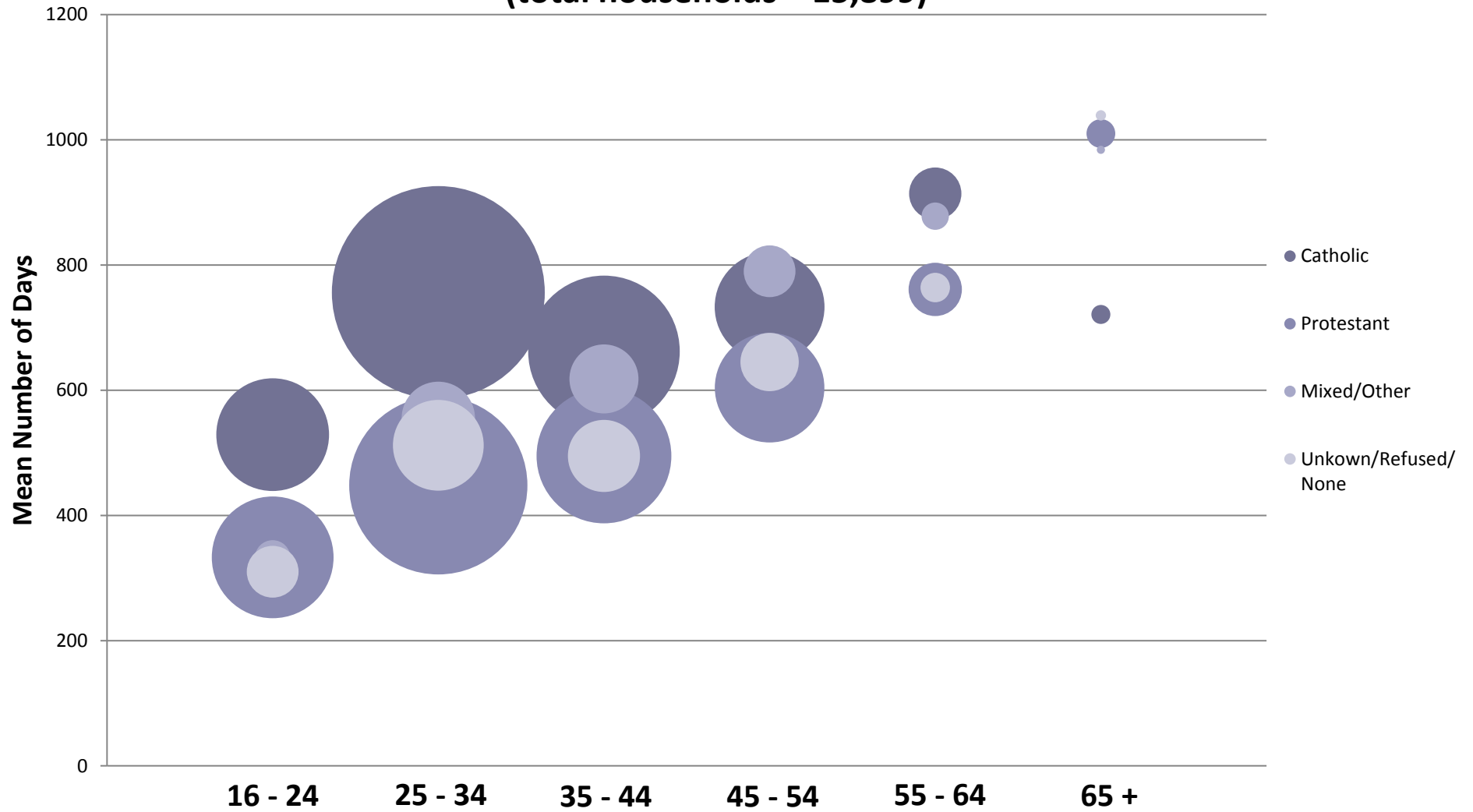
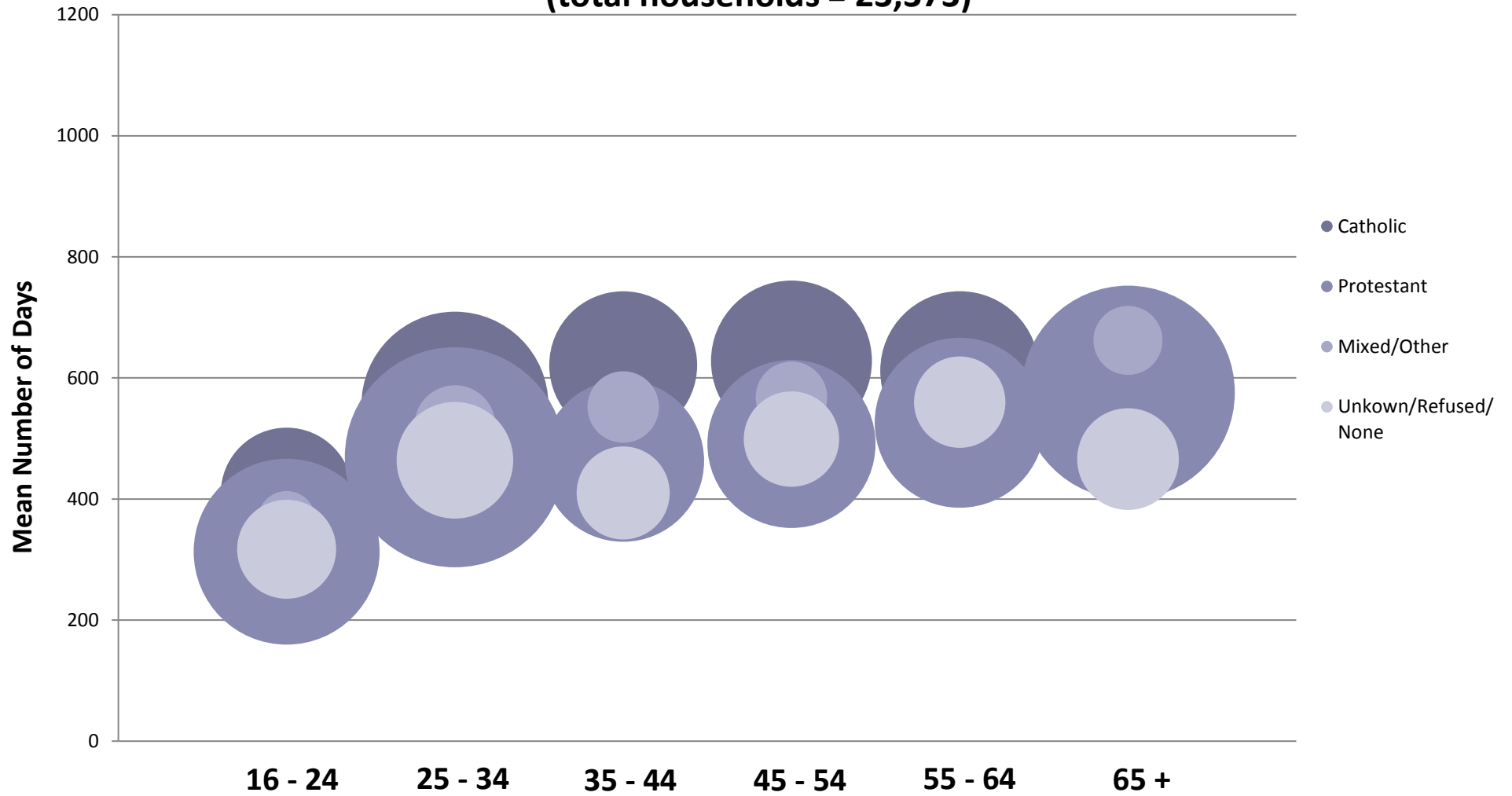## Chart 1: Mean waiting times by points (allocated applicants)
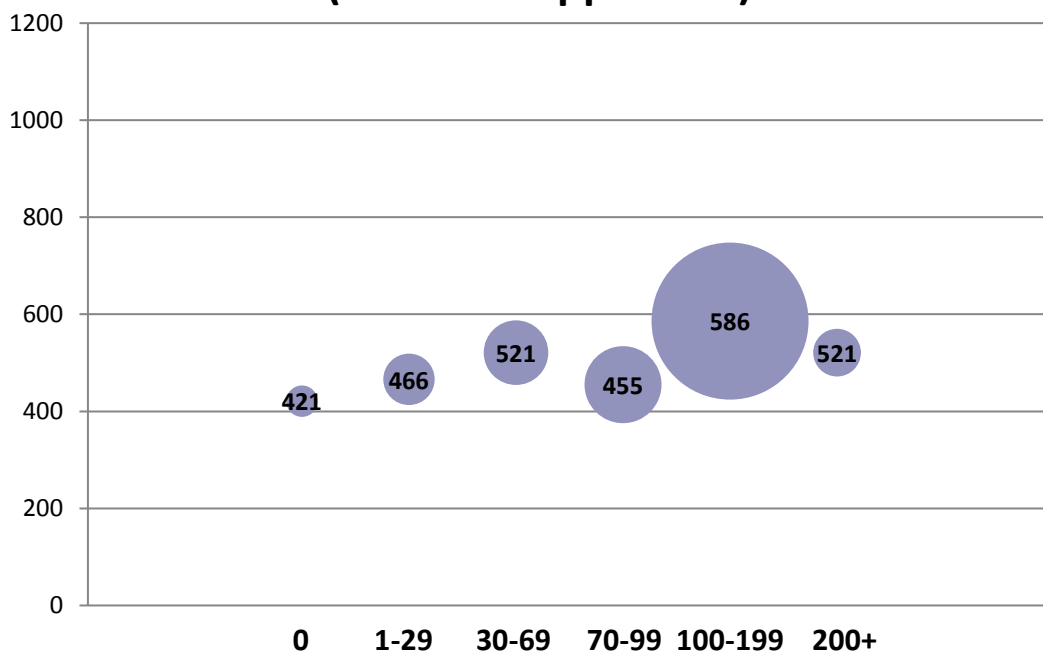
5.16   Among other factors, the shorter waiting times for those with lower points may reflect greater flexibility among those applicants, for example by choosing lower-demand areas or properties in order to increase their likelihood of receiving an allocation.

5.17   The bubble charts below show multiple identity waiting times, specifically, the age and religion variables against the presence or absence of dependants (charts 2 and 3), and age and dependants variables against each religious group in turn (charts 4-7).

5.18   Within each chart, the sizes of the bubbles represent the number of applicants, but it should be noted that **each graph uses a different scale**, based on the total number of applicants within each group. To provide some consistency, the *y* axis is set at the same level across all charts.

5.19   The charts indicate that:

- Waiting times were shortest for younger applicants and longest for older applicants, particularly those with dependants;
- Waiting times for those without dependants were on average shorter and more similar across the four religious groupings; and
- Waiting times for those with dependants were on average longer and there was more variation across the four religious groupings, with Catholic households tending to have experienced longer waiting times.

Chart 2: Average waiting times (by age and religion) for households with dependants (total households = 15,899)

Mean Number of Days

- Catholic
- Protestant
- Mixed/Other
- Unkown/Refused/None

16 - 24   25 - 34   35 - 44   45 - 54   55 - 64   65 +

12

Chart 3: Average waiting times (by age and religion) for households without dependants (total households = 23,373)

Mean Number of Days

- Catholic
- Protestant
- Mixed/Other
- Unkown/Refused/None

16 - 24   25 - 34   35 - 44   45 - 54   55 - 64   65 +

13

Chart 4: Average waiting times (by age and dependants) for Catholic households (total households = 14,942)

Legend:
- With Dependants
- Without Dependants

Y-axis: Mean number of days (0, 200, 400, 600, 800, 1000, 1200)

X-axis: 16 - 24, 25 - 34, 35 - 44, 45 - 54, 55 - 64, 65 +
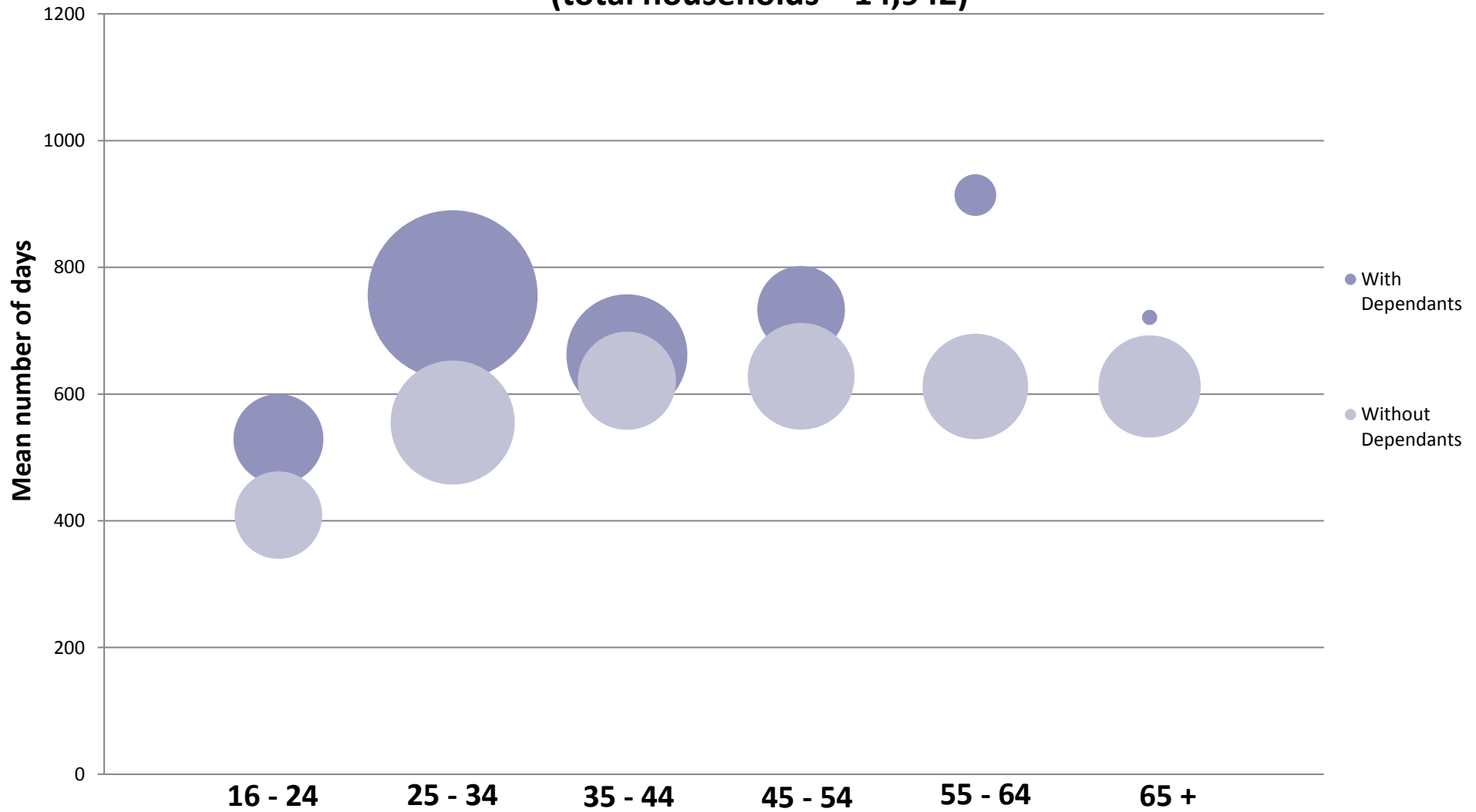
Chart 5: Average waiting times (by age and dependants) for Protestant households (total households = 17,023)

Mean number of days

1200
1000
800
600
400
200
0

With Dependants

Without Dependants

16 - 24   25 - 34   35 - 44   45 - 54   55 - 64   65 +

15
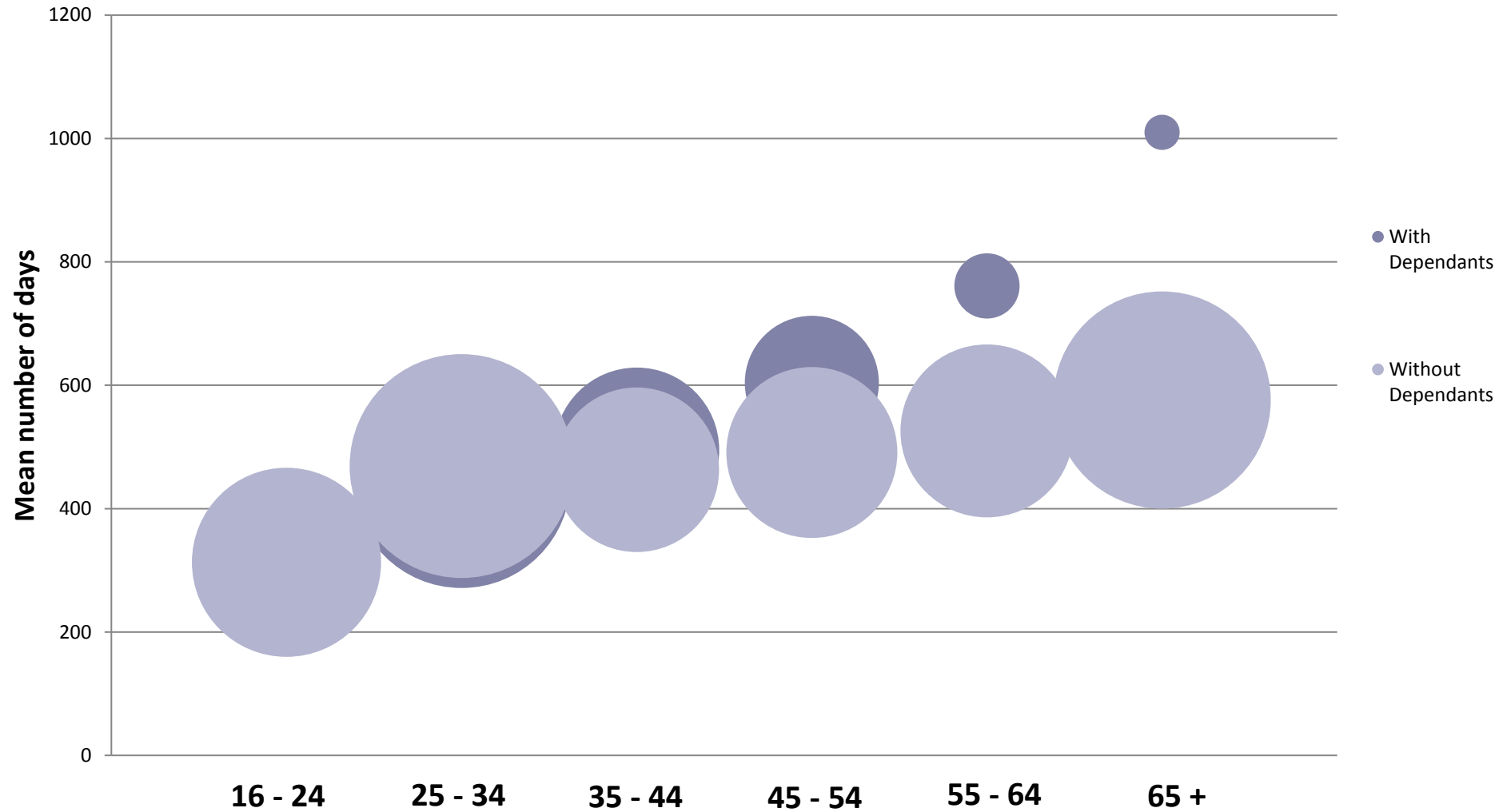
Chart 6: Average waiting times (by age and dependants) for Mixed/Other households (total households = 2,667)
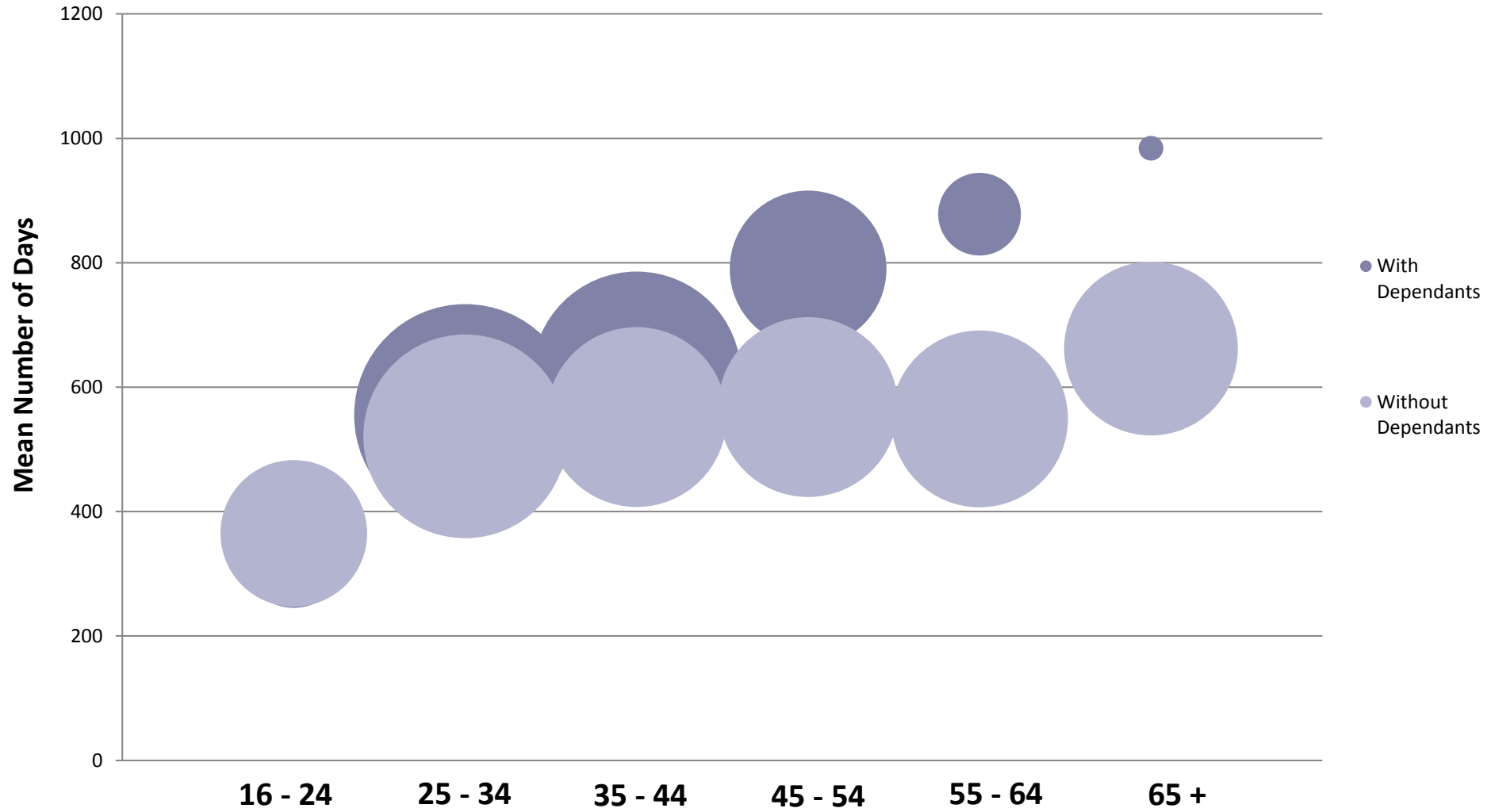
Chart 7: Average waiting times (by age and dependant) for Unknown/Refused/None religion households (total households = 4,640)
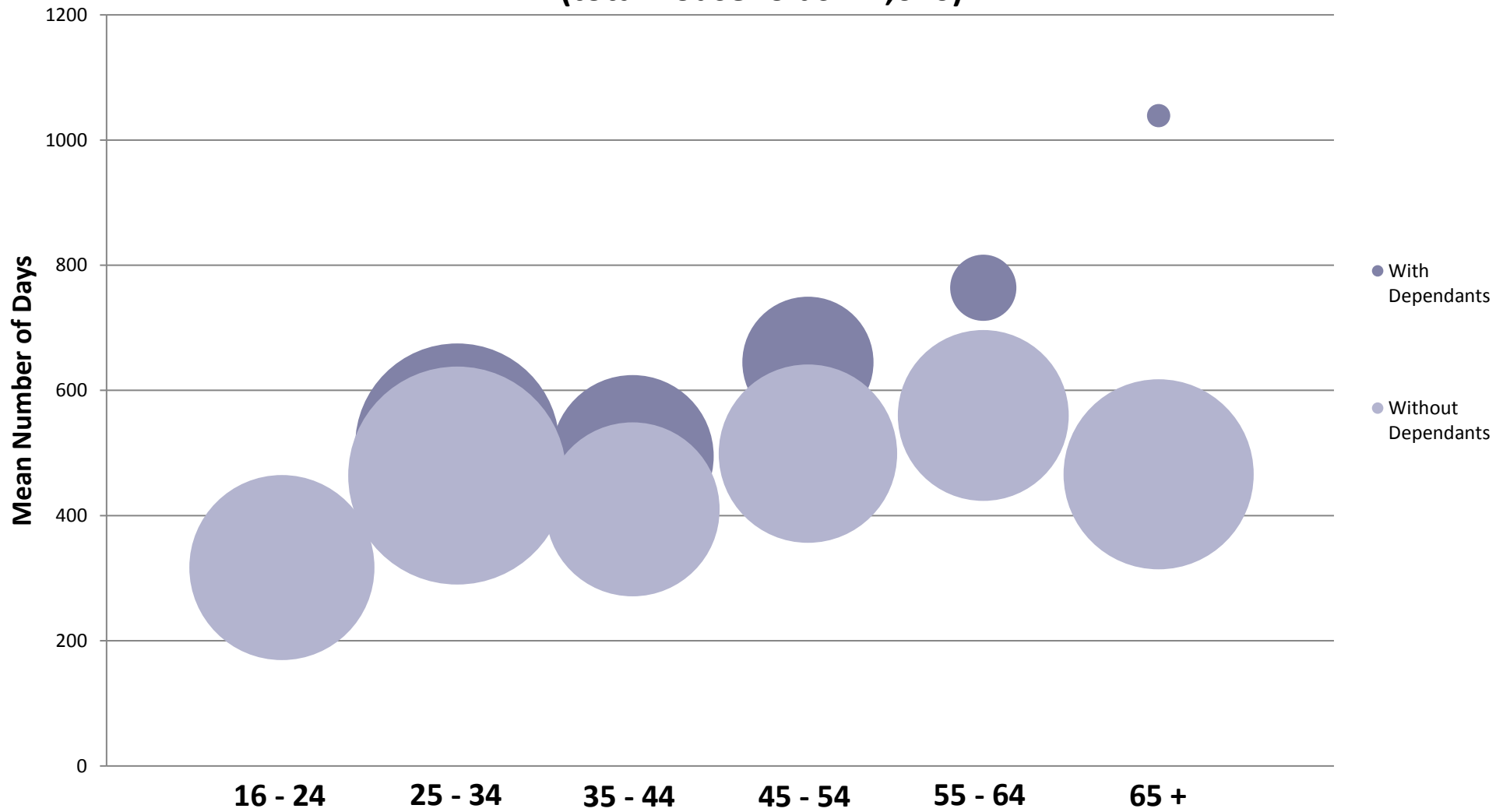

- With Dependants
- Without Dependants

Mean Number of Days (y-axis: 0, 200, 400, 600, 800, 1000, 1200)

Age groups (x-axis): 16 - 24, 25 - 34, 35 - 44, 45 - 54, 55 - 64, 65 +

17

6. Conclusions

6.1   These are descriptive statistics: as noted above, many factors including local geographies, local housing markets, availability of stock, actual housing need, individual choice and support needs, and demographics will have a strong influence on waiting times. All of these were excluded from the analysis.

6.2   Accounting for these many factors would require further analysis of quantitative information around supply and demand in local areas, and qualitative study of the key factors influencing applicants' choices of area and any refusal of reasonable offers.

6.3   In terms of outstanding policy questions for the fundamental review of allocations, this analysis has focused on waiting times across multiple identity groups, particularly the identified difference in outcomes (in terms of waiting times) between Protestant and Catholic households, where age and family status might be determining and compounding factors. This analysis cannot address the question of which of the three key variables – age, religion or dependency – has any influence, or the greatest influence, on waiting times.

6.4   The evidence that those in higher need tend to wait longer reflects many of the contextual issues outlined above. It may be that a shift in approach, to benefit those in similar levels of need based on their length of time waiting, would be one mechanism for addressing the longer waiting times among those in high levels of need.

Annex A: Mean number of days on the waiting list for those allocated a home

The tables are heat maps. The warmer colours (red / orange /yellow) indicate short waiting times and the cooler colours (green / blue) indicate longer waiting times. The mean for all applicants is 545 days.

Table A.1: Data presented by dependants

		All ages	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
All Applicants	**All religions**	**545**	370	564	553	599	600	585
	Catholics	640	471	686	646	670	653	614
	Protestants	477	321	459	479	534	555	587
	Mixed / Other	574	353	539	590	664	608	668
	None / Refused / Unknown	473	315	486	449	551	586	474
Dependants	**All religions**	594	410	614	581	677	832	935
	Catholics	705	529	756	662	733	914	721
	Protestants	477	333	448	495	604	761	1010
	Mixed / Other	617	332	555	618	790	878	984
	None / Refused / Unknown	517	310	512	495	645	764	1039
No Dependants	**All religions**	511	342	501	519	550	564	577
	Catholics	579	409	555	621	628	612	612
	Protestants	476	313	469	463	491	526	576
	Mixed / Other	544	365	521	552	568	549	662
	None / Refused / Unknown	451	317	464	410	499	560	466

ANNEX A - Mean number of days on the waiting list for those allocated a home

Table A.2: Data presented by religion

		All ages	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
All Religions	**All Applicants**	545	370	564	553	599	600	585
	Dependants	594	410	614	581	677	832	935
	No Dependants	511	342	501	519	550	564	577
	All Catholic Applicants	640	471	686	646	670	653	614
Catholics	Dependants	705	529	756	662	733	914	721
	No Dependants	579	409	555	621	628	612	612
	All Protestant Applicants	477	321	459	479	534	555	587
Protestants	Dependants	477	333	448	495	604	761	1010
	No Dependants	476	313	469	463	491	526	576
	All Mixed / Other Applicants	574	353	539	590	664	608	668
Mixed	Dependants	617	332	555	618	790	878	984
Other	No Dependants	544	365	521	552	568	549	662
Refused	**All RUN Applicants**	473	315	486	449	551	586	474
None	Dependants	517	310	512	495	645	764	1039
Unknown	No Dependants	451	317	464	410	499	560	466

ANNEX A - Mean number of days on the waiting list for those allocated a home

Table A.3: Data presented by age group

		All Applicants	Dependants	No Dependants
All ages	**All religions**	**545**	594	511
	Catholic	640	705	579
	Protestant	477	477	476
	Mixed / Other	574	617	544
	Refused /Unknown /None	473	517	451
16 -24	All religions	370	410	342
	Catholic	471	529	409
	Protestant	321	333	313
	Mixed / Other	353	332	365
	Refused /Unknown /None	315	310	317
25 - 34	All religions	564	614	501
	Catholic	686	756	555
	Protestant	459	448	469
	Mixed / Other	539	555	521
	Refused /Unknown /None	486	512	464
35 - 44	All religions	553	581	519
	Catholic	646	662	621
	Protestant	479	495	463
	Mixed / Other	590	618	552
	Refused /Unknown /None	449	495	410
45 - 54	All religions	599	677	550
	Catholic	670	733	628
	Protestant	534	604	491
	Mixed / Other	664	790	568
	Refused /Unknown /None	551	645	499
55 - 64	All religions	600	832	564
	Catholic	653	914	612
	Protestant	555	761	526
	Mixed / Other	608	878	549
	Refused /Unknown /None	586	764	560
65 +	All religions	585	935	577
	Catholic	614	721	612
	Protestant	587	1010	576
	Mixed / Other	668	984	662
	Refused /Unknown /None	474	1039	466