

HOUSING OPTIONS AND HOMELESSNESS ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17

Report by Director for Development

PURPOSE OF REPORT To provide the Comhairle with an update of housing options and homelessness issues covering the year 2016/17.

COMPETENCE

- 1.1 The Comhairle has a statutory duty towards homeless persons and those threatened with homelessness in terms of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 Part II as amended by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003.
- 1.2 There are no current legal, financial or other constraints to the recommendations being implemented.
- 1.3 There are no Equalities issues arising from the Report.

SUMMARY

- 2.1 In the period 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017, a total of 136 households made a homelessness application to the Comhairle in terms of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 Part II as amended, and the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003. A further 17 households were assisted under the housing options approach. Of these 17, 7 households went on to make a homeless presentation.
- 2.2 Of all homeless applications made to the Comhairle in 2015-2016, 104 were made to Lewis (5 of which were from Harris), 22 to Uist and 10 to Barra.
- 2.3 The Comhairle accepted a duty to permanently accommodate 101 households in this period and discharged its duty to 58 households by providing them with permanent accommodation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

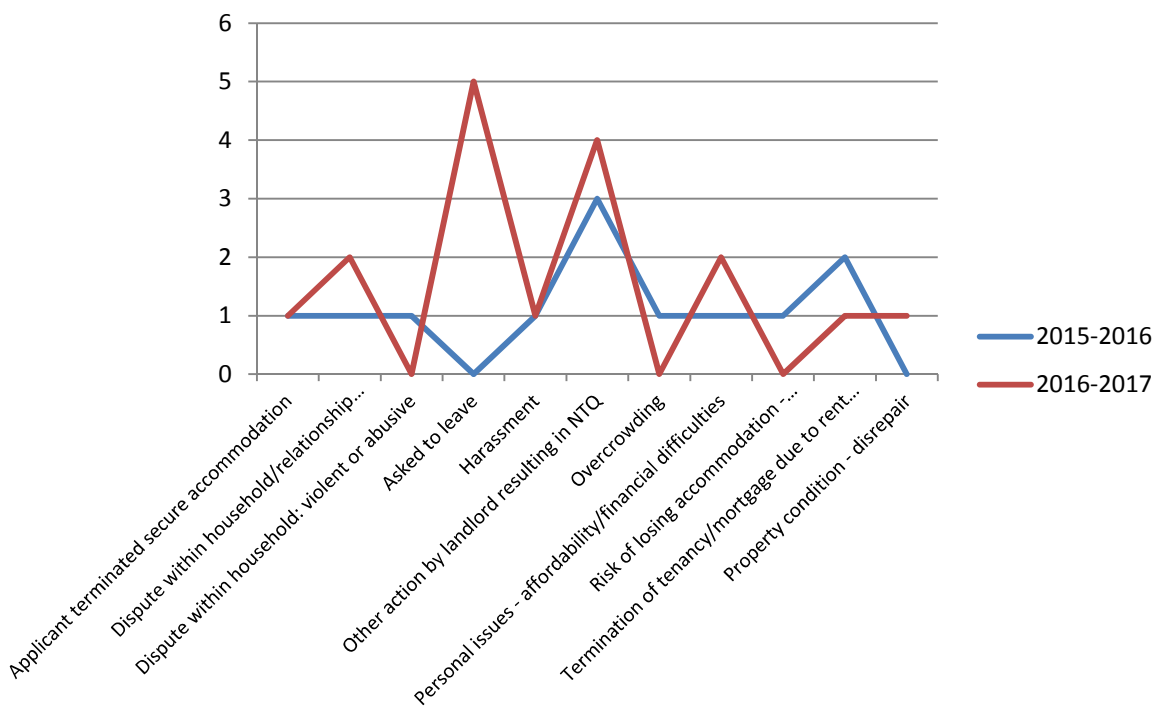
- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle:**
 - a) **note the contents of this Report.**

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Appendix: None
Background Papers: None

HOUSING OPTIONS APPLICATIONS AND OUTCOMES

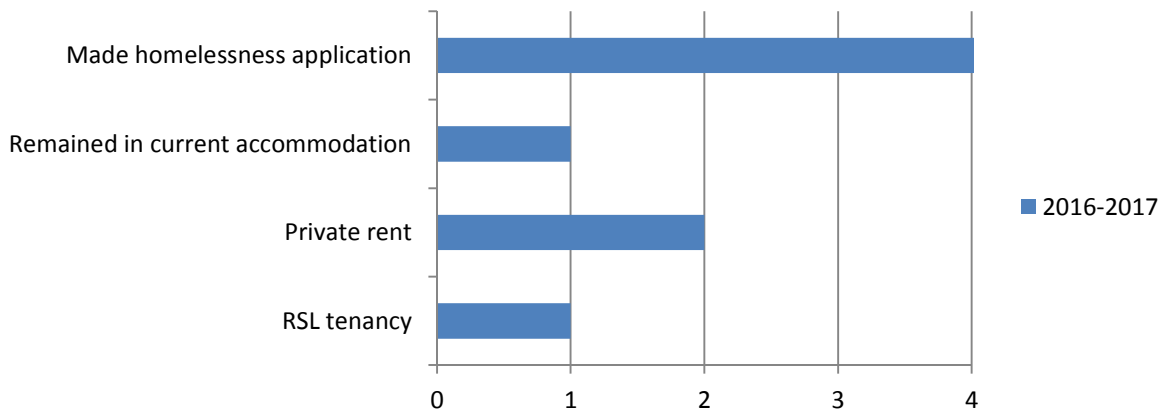
- 4.1 Any applicant threatened with homelessness presenting to the Service is offered a housing options interview in the first instance in order to attempt to prevent homelessness from happening. The Comhairle has a duty to advise all applicants of their right to a homelessness interview if that is their preferred option. During the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017, 17 housing options applications were made. Housing Options applications are low, possibly due to the lack of options available and the generally held perception that a social tenancy is preferable to a private tenancy.
- 4.2 Reasons given for making a housing options application are shown at Chart 1 below. It is difficult to make any valid statistical analysis due to the low numbers but the most common reason given is a notice to quit a private tenancy.

Chart 1 – Reasons given for Housing Options applications in the Western Isles 2015-2017



- 4.3 Housing Options applicants are provided with advice and assistance to try and assist them to remain in their present accommodation, if safe to do so, or find alternative accommodation before the applicant actually becomes homeless. This may include general housing advice, the provision of aids and adaptations, benefit maximisation, and financial advice.
- 4.4 Seven Housing Options applications were closed during 2016-2017. Three of these went on to make a homelessness application to the Comhairle. Of all Housing Options applications made in the year, 5% went on to make a homelessness application. In Scotland, 58% of homeless applicants in 2016-2017 had made a Housing Options application prior to their homelessness application.

Chart 2- Housing Options Outcomes in the Western Isles 2016-2017



HOMELESSNESS APPLICATIONS

5.1 During the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017, 136 homelessness applications were made to the Comhairle consisting of 152 adults and 72 children. This is a 13% decrease on last year's figure of 157. Applications have been decreasing for Scotland as a whole for the past number of years with a further 2% decrease last year. Homelessness applications decreased for half of Scotland's Local Authorities in 2016-2017.

Chart 3 - Homeless and Housing Options Applications in the Western Isles 2007-2017

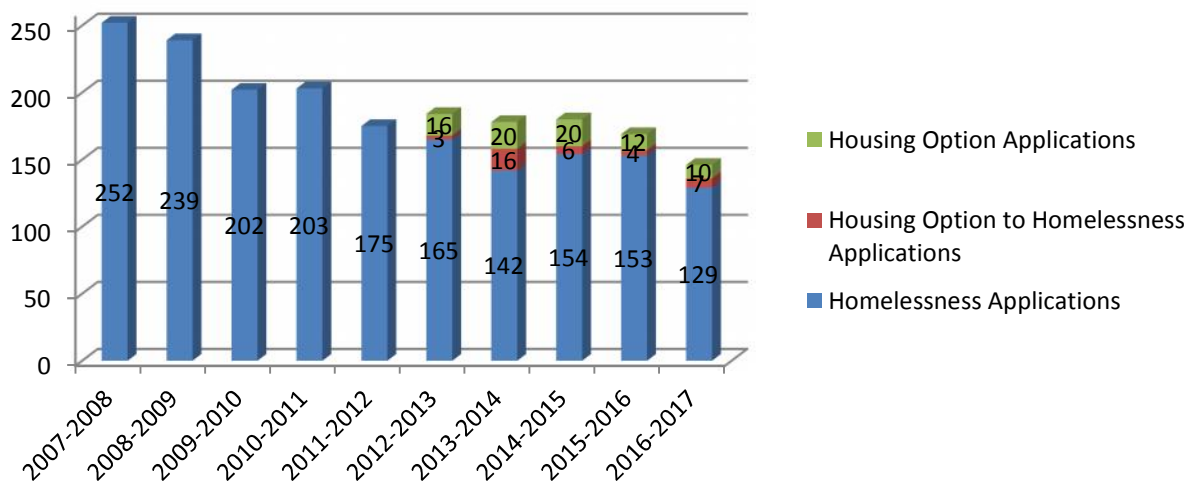
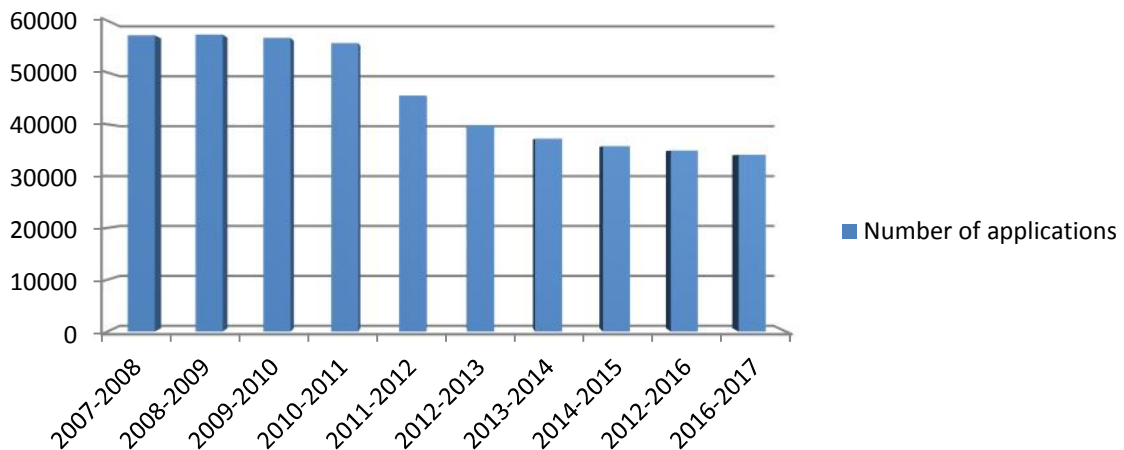


Chart 4 - Homeless Applications in Scotland 2007-2017



5.2 The majority of presentations continue to be made to Stornoway. Proportions presenting have remained fairly consistent across the area offices other than an increase for Barra. Over this period 70% of presentations were from Lewis, 3% from Harris, 22.5% from Uist and 4.5% from Barra.

5.3 The majority of homelessness applications are made to the Stornoway Office which covers Lewis and Harris. Numbers presenting in Lewis have decreased steadily over the past 10 years as shown in Chart 5.3 below. The overall trend in Uist, while fluctuating, is a slight decrease whilst numbers in Harris and Barra have remained low and fairly constant.

Chart 5 - Homelessness Applications in the Western Isles by area 2016-2017

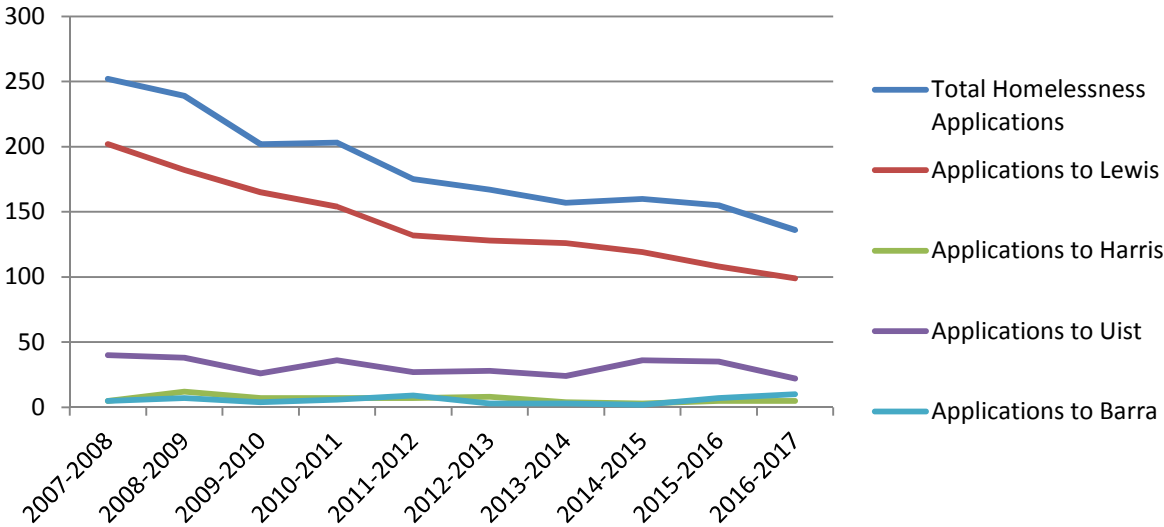


Table 1 – Proportion of homeless presentations to total households in the Western Isles by area 2015-2016

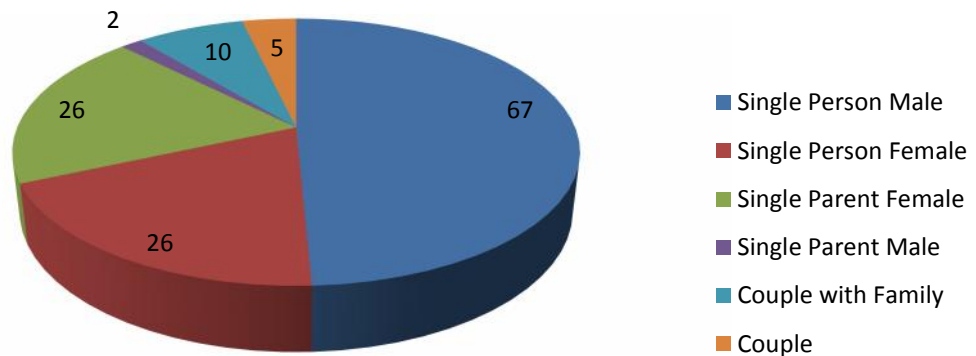
	Lewis	Harris	Uist	Barra
Total number of households by area ¹	8,846	911	2,232	587
Total number of households presenting as homeless	99	5	22	10
Proportion of homeless applicants to all homeless households	73%	3.5%	16%	7.5%
Proportion of homeless households to all households by area	1.1%	0.5%	1%	1.7%

5.4 The Comhairle’s rate of repeat homelessness in 2067-2017 was very low at 1%. A household is regarded as a repeat presentation if they apply within 12 months of a previous application being closed. The average in Scotland was 6.7%.

¹ Data from 2011 Western Isles Census

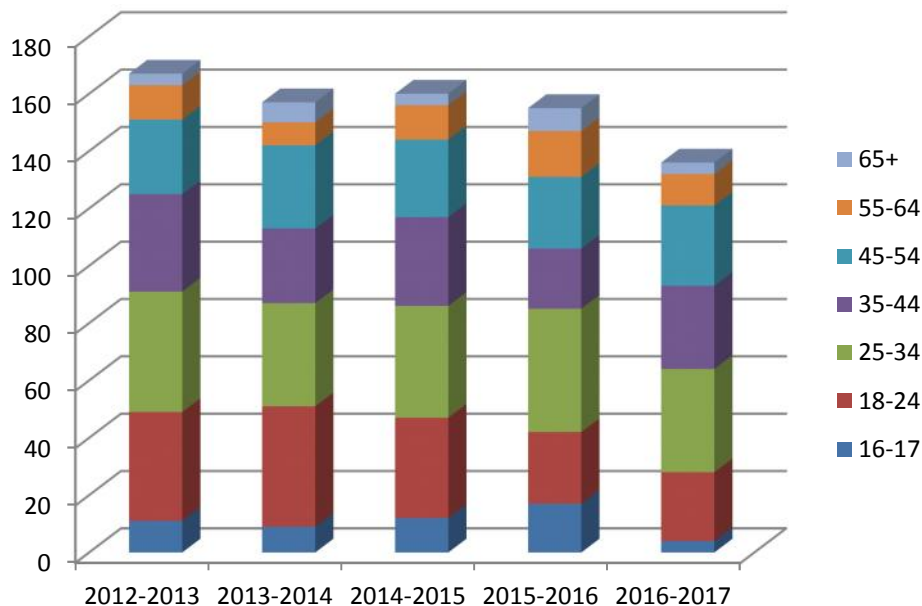
5.5 Household types presenting in the Western Isles generally remain consistent proportionately locally and nationally. The main household type presenting continues to be single people with 50% of applications being made by single men and 19% by single women. In Scotland as a whole 46% of applicants were single men and 21% single women.

Chart 6 – Homeless Applications in the Western Isles in 2016-2017 by Household Type



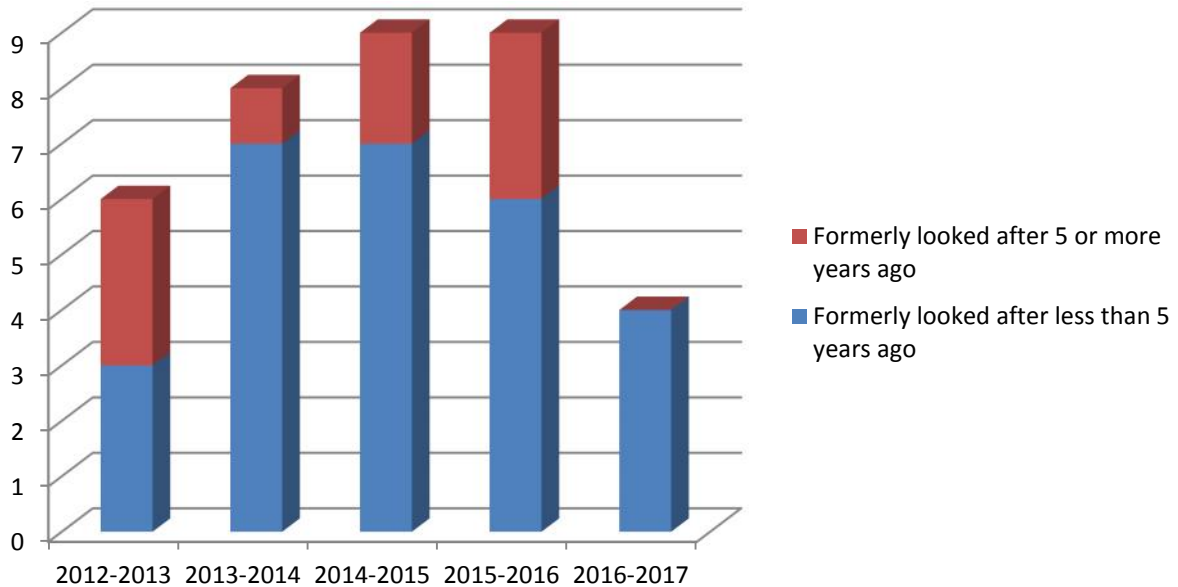
5.6 Applications can be broken down further into age ranges over the past five years for the main applicant as shown at Chart 5.5 below. The overall numbers of young people presenting has declined with only 4 aged 16-17 presenting in 2016-2017.

Chart 7 – Homeless Age Groups 2012-2017



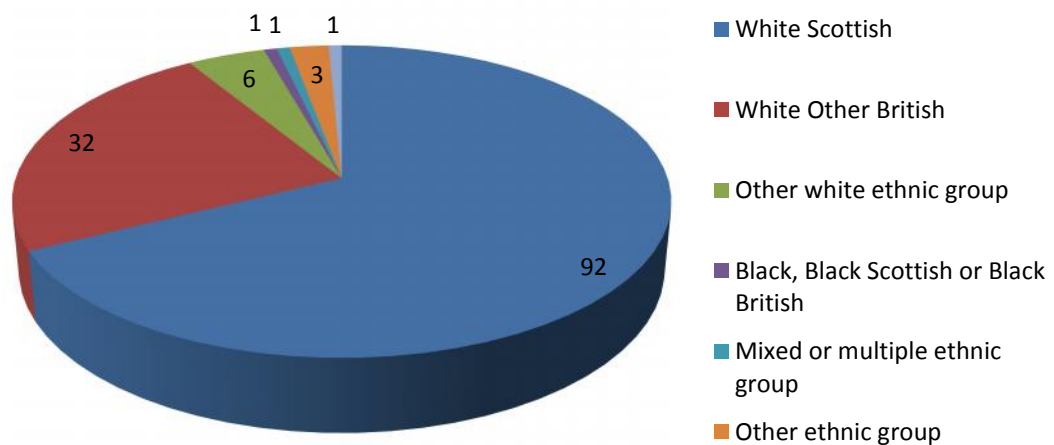
5.7 The Comhairle also records the number of care leavers presenting as homeless. In the year 2016-2017, 3% of applicants (4 young people) had been formerly looked after by the local authority, all in the past 5 years. This compares with the 6% of applicants who were formerly looked after children who applied as homeless across Scotland in 2016-2017.

Chart 8 – Formerly Looked After Children Presenting as Homeless in the Western Isles 2016-2017



5.8 The ethnic origin of homeless applicants in the Western Isles for 2015 to 2016 is shown at Chart 7 below. No applicants described themselves as a gypsy/traveller. Sixteen applicants stated that they had a physical disability. It is very difficult to make any detailed analysis of outcomes for homeless applicants by ethnic group given the small numbers presenting from minority groups, but there are no obvious areas for concern.

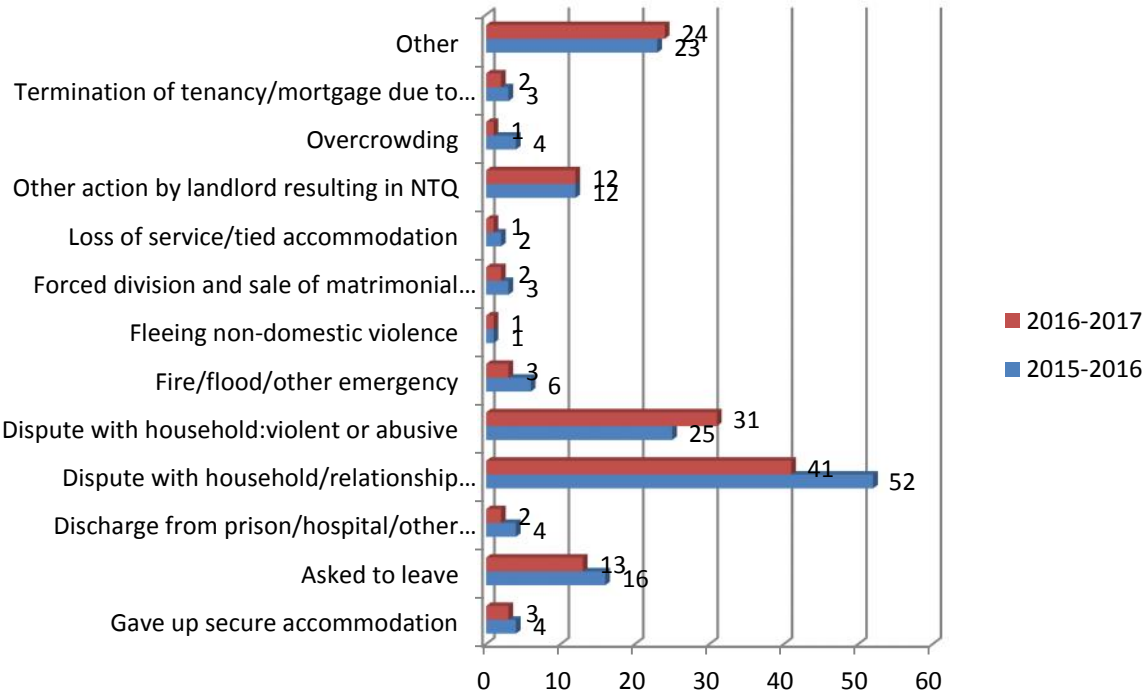
Chart 9 – Homeless Applications in the Western Isles by Ethnic Origin 2016-2017



5.9 Nine applicants had previously been a member of the armed services with one having served less than 5 years ago.

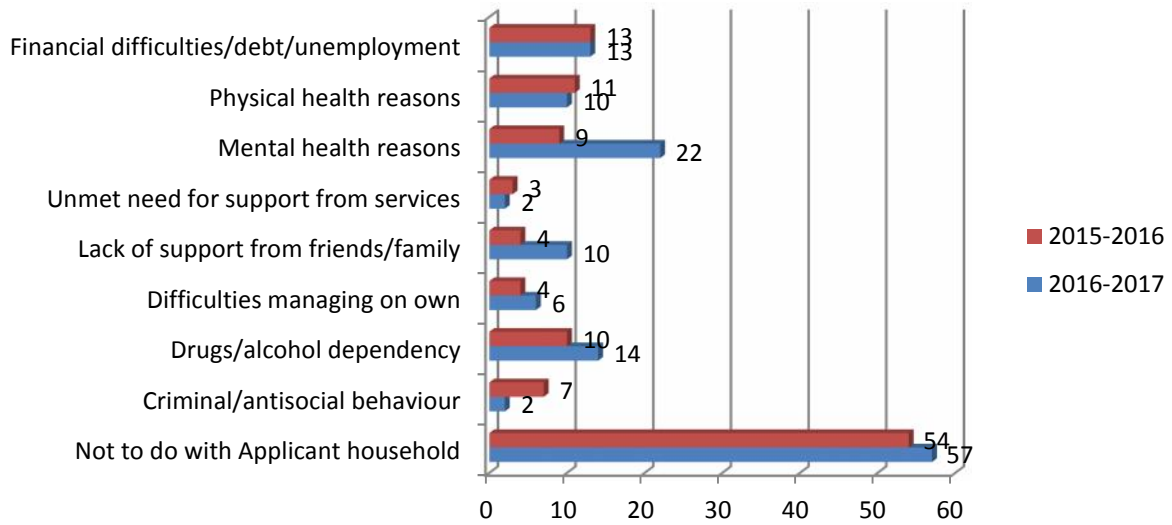
- 5.10 A further 14 applicants stated that they had slept rough in the 3 months preceding making a homeless application, with 9 of these saying that they had slept rough on the preceding night. The Western Isles has no long-term rough sleepers. Almost all instances of rough sleeping involve sleeping in a car or shed, or walking around waiting for the Office to open the next day.
- 5.11 The main reason given for presenting as homeless continues to be a dispute within the household with 53% of applicants citing this as the reason for homelessness in 2016-2017. Of those who presented for this reason, 43% stated that there was abuse in the relationship. Numbers of those disclosing domestic abuse rose from 18 households in 2014-2015 to 31 in 2016-2017. This increase in disclosures suggests that, rather than the incidences of domestic abuse increasing, ongoing partnership working to raise the awareness of domestic abuse is proving effective. Throughout Scotland as a whole in 2016-2017, 30% of homelessness applications were because of a dispute in the household and 25% were because the applicant had been asked to leave.

Chart 10 - Technical Reasons for Homelessness in the Western Isles 2015-2016 and 2016-2017



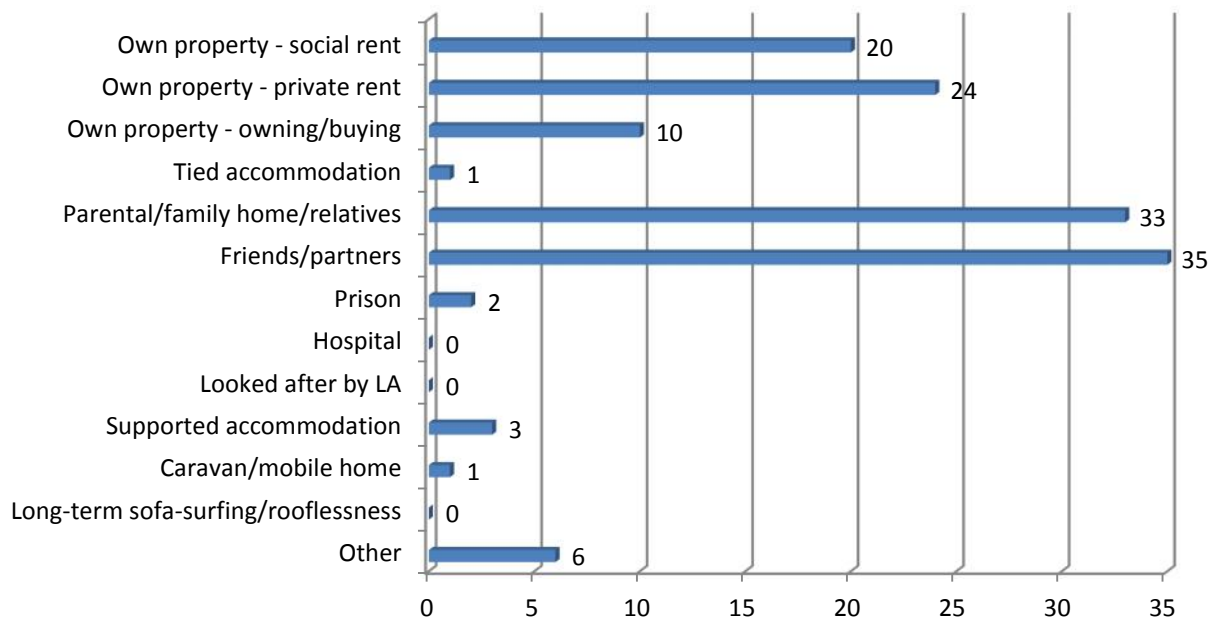
- 5.12 Underlying reasons for failing to maintain the household's existing accommodation are also investigated as shown at Chart 11. 10% of households stated that financial difficulties, debt or unemployment was a contributing factor to their homelessness, the same percentage as the previous 2 years. 16% of applicants in Scotland in 2016-2017 stated that this contributed to their homelessness. The Comhairle will monitor the ongoing impact of Welfare Reform and Universal Credit. The main contributory factor given was mental health with 16% of all applicants stating that this was a contributing factor to their homelessness, a 60% increase on the previous year. Furthermore, 49 households (36% of all applicants) were identified as requiring support due to mental health issues as shown at Table 3 on Page 13 of this report. A further 11 applicants stated that they required support due to a learning disability. This illustrates the continuing pressures on the Service both for staff and resources as a result of mental health issues and learning difficulties.

Chart 11 – Underlying reasons for failing to maintain accommodation in the Western Isles 2015-2016 and 2016-2017



5.13 Of the 136 households who applied in 2016-2017, 68 (50%) had been living with friends or relatives while 54 (40%) had been living in their own property (i.e. which they either rented or owned).

Chart 12 – Prior housing circumstances of applicants in the Western Isles 2016-2017



HOMELESSNESS ASSESSMENTS

- 6.1 In the year 2016-2017, 26 households resolved their homelessness or withdrew their application prior to an assessment being made, often due to a relationship breakdown being resolved. Six households were assessed as neither homeless nor potentially homeless. Contact was lost with four households. All households who applied were eligible for some form of assistance. Of the remaining 100 households assessed as homeless or potentially homeless, 92 were assessed as unintentionally homeless. A further 8 were found to be intentionally homeless.

Table 2 – Assessments of homeless applications 2014-2017

	2014-2015		2015-2016		2016-2017	
	CNES	Scotland	CNES	Scotland	CNES	Scotland
Unintentionally homeless	76%	77%	75%	78%	68%	78%
Intentionally homeless	5%	5%	3%	4%	6%	4%
Assessed as not homeless	0.6%	4%	3%	4%	4%	4%
Lost contact, withdrew etc.	17.5%	13%	17.5%	14%	22%	14%
All assessments	166	35,886	154	34,628	140	34,267

- 6.2 In the period 2016-2017, 7 households were assessed as unintentionally homeless with no local connection. All 7 were provided with temporary accommodation for a reasonable period of time to allow them to secure alternative accommodation.

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

- 7.1 There are presently 72 operational homeless temporary accommodation units throughout the Western Isles. The Comhairle provides 39 of these from its own stock, leases a further 32 properties from HHP, and leases one property in Barra from the private sector.
- 7.2 Bed and Breakfast usage has continued to reduce. At the date of writing this Report the Comhairle was providing 5 households with Bed and Breakfast, all in Stornoway.
- 7.3 The Comhairle continues to work with Hebridean Housing Partnership and to identify alternative options to increase the supply of temporary accommodation for households without children in order to prevent the use of Bed and Breakfast for all households as much as possible.
- 7.4 In 2016/17, the Comhairle accommodated 18 homeless households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation with an average length of stay of 7.5 weeks, a decrease of 32% on the length of stay for 2015/16. A further 109 households were provided with furnished temporary accommodation, 39 of these in The Acres. It should be noted that these figures reflect households whose cases have been closed or who have been moved in the year. The average lengths of stay in self-contained accommodation was 31.5 weeks and 17 weeks for The Acres. The overall lengths of stay for households in temporary accommodation is likely to increase due to the increasing pressure on available permanent stock, particularly for those households waiting for an offer of a 2 or 5 apartment tenancy.

7.5 Of all homeless households provided with Bed and Breakfast accommodation in this period, none breached the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order which restricts the use of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation for households with children or pregnant women.

Chart 13 – Numbers of cases closed in the year provided with temporary accommodation in the Western Isles 2010-2017

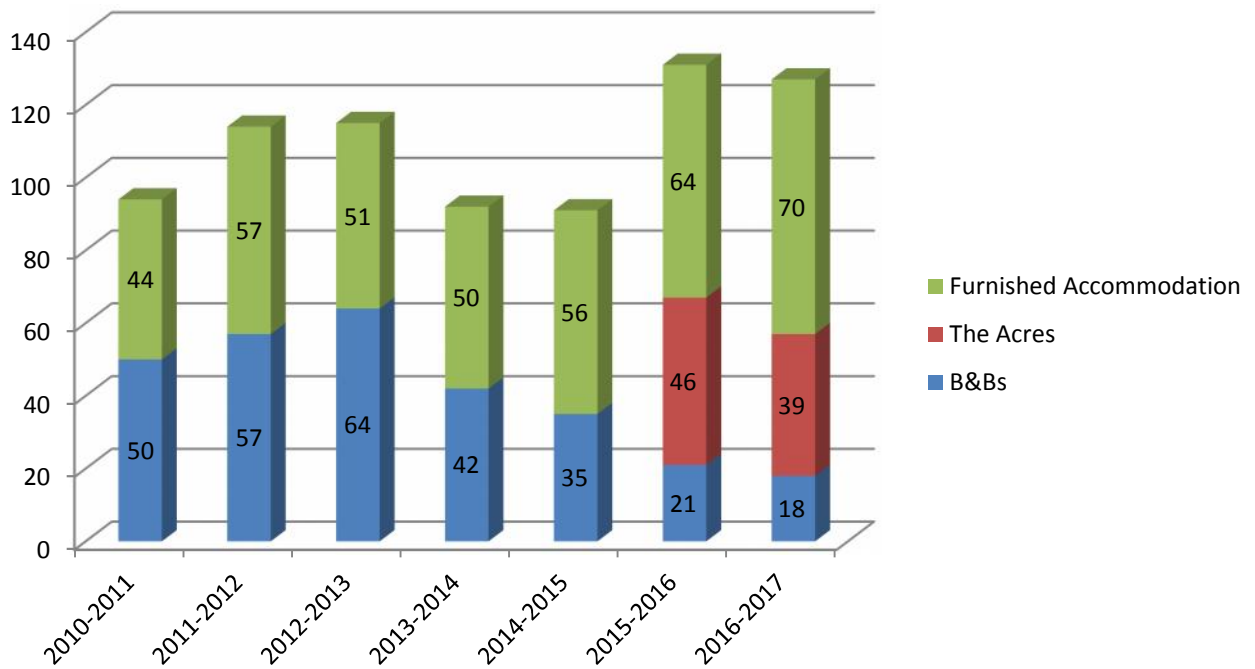
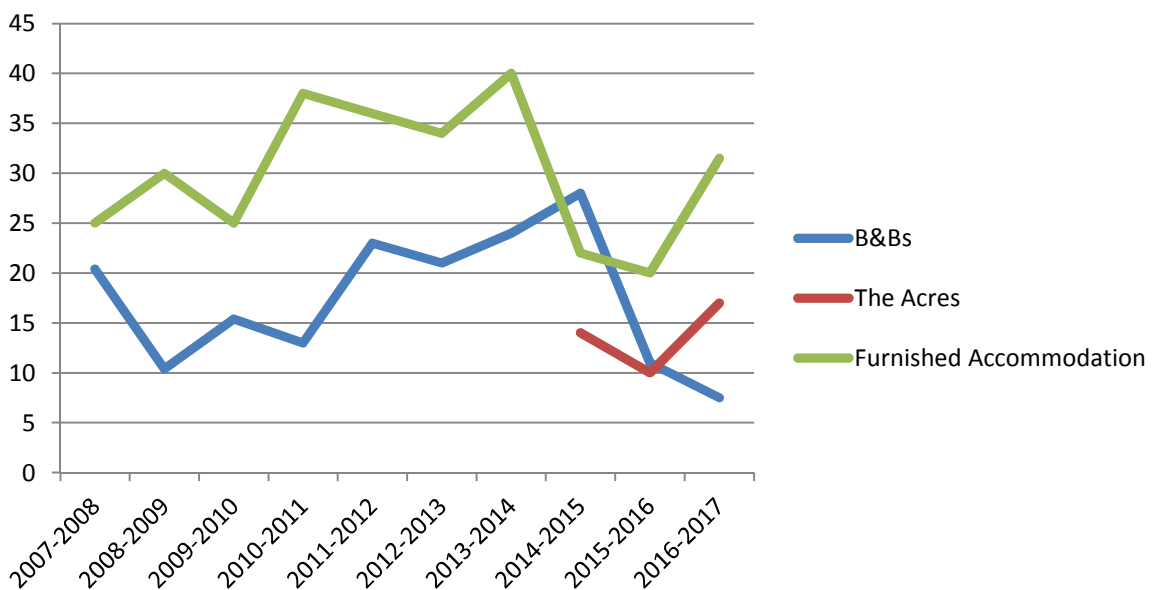


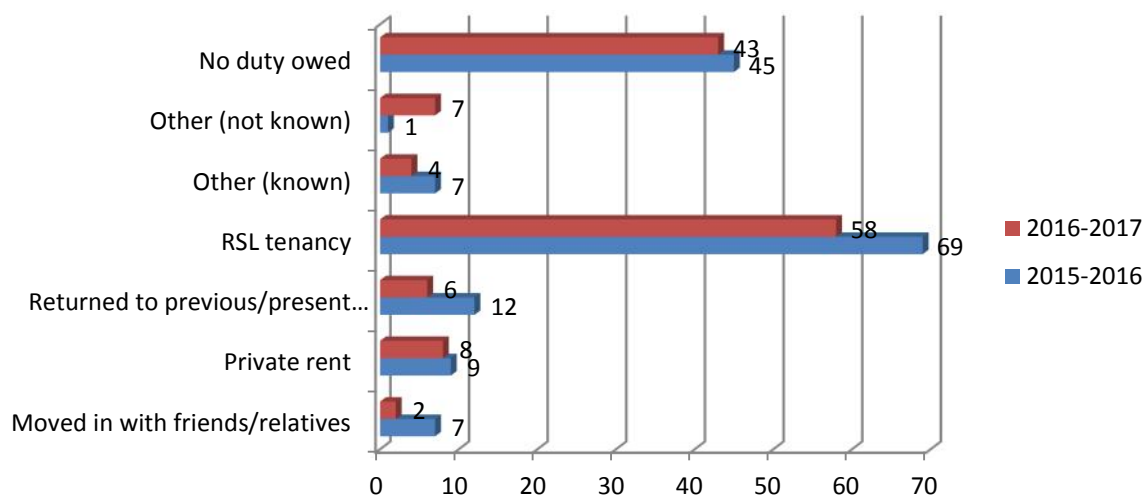
Chart 14 – Lengths of stay in temporary accommodation in the Western Isles for closed cases 2007-2017 (weeks)



PERMANENT ACCOMMODATION

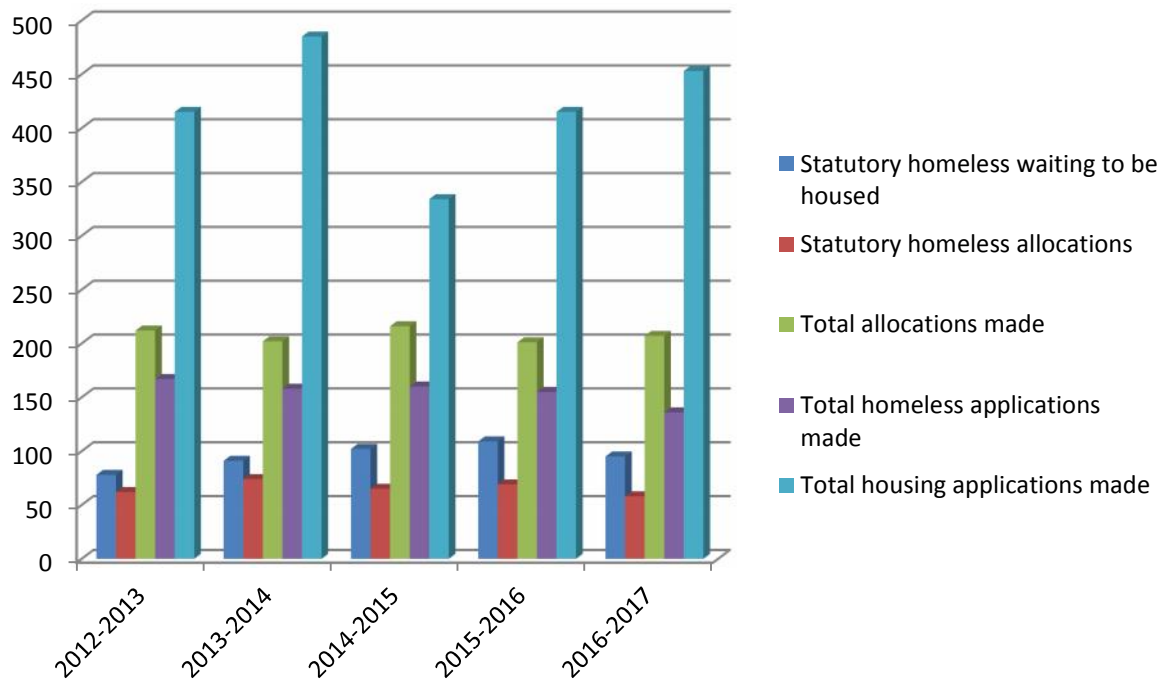
- 8.1 At the date of writing this Report, 95 priority homeless households were waiting for an offer of permanent housing in order for the Comhairle's duty to them to be fully discharged. This is a 13% decrease in the numbers waiting compared to the same date in 2015/16. In this period, 58 homeless households were provided with a permanent tenancy under homelessness legislation. This figure represents 28% of all allocations made in the Western Isles, a decrease of 15% of all allocations made in the preceding year. Chart 15 shows the housing outcomes for all cases closed in 2015/16.

Chart 15 – Known outcomes for homeless households in the Western Isles for cases closed in 2015-2016 and 2016-2017.



- 8.2 Stornoway continues to be the most pressurised area. Of all social housing allocations made in 2016/17 in Stornoway, 40% were to statutory homeless household. HHP aims to allocate 50% of properties in Stornoway to homeless households. The greatest pressure is on the two apartment list. At present 41 statutory homeless households are awaiting a two apartment property where Stornoway is their first area of choice, compared with 13 awaiting a 3 apartment in Stornoway, 6 awaiting a 4 apartment and 4 awaiting an offer of a 5 apartment property. Waiting list times for 2 and 5 apartment properties are the longest and this impacts on the number of allocations that HHP are making.
- 8.3 The average length of time taken to make a first offer of permanent housing to priority homeless households was 345 days in 2016/17, a 25% increase on the time taken in 2015/16. It took an average of 364 days, a 26% increase on the preceding year, for all priority homeless households to be housed as 12 households waited for a second offer. HHP aim to make a first offer of permanent housing to 25% of statutory homeless cases within 3 months from the date of the Comhairle's homelessness decision. In 2016/17, 26% of first offers were made within 3 months. 17% of first offers were made within three months across Lewis and Harris, and 36% of first offers were made within three months in Uist and Barra. The Comhairle will continue to work in partnership with HHP to ensure that every effort is made to achieve a reasonable balance of allocations being made to homeless households against those made to the general waiting list. Chart 16 below illustrates the pressures on waiting lists.

Chart 16 – Housing and homelessness trends 2012-2017



HOMELESS SUPPORT SERVICE

- 9.1 The Homeless Support Service continues to provide support to homeless and potentially homeless households. Where relevant, support continues through to a permanent tenancy until all benefits and utilities are sorted and the household is settled. In 2016/17 there were 42 new referrals made to this service.
- 9.2 Tenancy sustainment levels continue to be high with 90% of homeless applicants housed permanently under homelessness legislation in 2015-2016 sustaining their tenancy for more than one year. (Of the 6 tenancies that were not sustained none would be classed as a failed tenancy as there were valid reasons for the tenant moving to alternative accommodation). For all households housed by HHP in 2015-2016, 84% sustained their tenancy for more than one year.
- 9.3 In order to assist in preventing repeat homelessness for those households provided with permanent accommodation under homelessness legislation, the Comhairle has worked with local churches to provide starter packs, and recycles second hand furniture provided by the general public, sometimes collecting donations and distributing to new tenants on the same day. In 2016-2017 the Comhairle assisted 16 households by providing second hand furniture and will work with Scottish Churches Housing Action to revitalise the local starter pack scheme.
- 9.4 Rent deposits are used to prevent homelessness under the housing options approach where appropriate, thus reducing the amount of households requiring temporary accommodation and, as a result, the overall cost of bed and breakfast.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

- 10.1 The Comhairle works closely with a number of partner agencies to ensure full provision of services including support, advice and information, is available to homeless households.
- 10.2 Households applying as homeless are asked if they have any of a number of support needs and are referred to partner agencies if appropriate. Referrals are only made if agreed by the applicant. Some households applying to the Homelessness Service are already open cases to partner agencies when they apply, therefore no new referral is made. Partner agencies include Adult Services, Education and Children's Services, Health, the Foyer, the Trussell Trust Food Bank, Hebrides Alpha, Dochas and local Churches.

Table 3 – Support needs as identified by household when making homeless application 2014-2017

Support Need	Number of applicants		
	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
Mental health	43	40	49
Learning disability	4	15	11
Physical disability	10	19	16
Medical condition	27	34	29
Drug or alcohol dependency	21	24	24
Basic housing management/independent living skills	9	14	12

- 10.3 The Homelessness Service continues to work in partnership with Education and Children's Services in the provision of supported accommodation for young people in The Old House. It is anticipated that close partnership working will improve the outcomes for vulnerable young homeless people and those threatened with homelessness.
- 10.4 The Homelessness Service also continues to support the multi-agency Syrian Refugee Families Resettlement Planning Group by offering housing support to assist in the co-ordination of accommodation, services and ongoing support for the families prior to, during and after resettlement.
- 10.5 As well as contributing to the Health and Homelessness Action Plan for the Western Isles, the Comhairle continues to work with NHS Western Isles in providing hot meals from for homeless households. In the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016, 52 NHS vouchers were distributed. A further 112 food vouchers (including 64 Christmas food parcels) were issued for the Trussell Trust Food Bank operated by New Wine Church, a slight decrease on the previous year's figure of 121. The Comhairle canteen continues to provide leftover hot food to The Acres residents, Monday to Friday and Tesco now provide produce on a Saturday night due to go out of date.

HOUSING OPTIONS HUB

- 11.1 The Comhairle participates in the North & Islands Housing Options Hub which aims to meet at least quarterly with a view to preventing homelessness through the development of a housing options approach. The Scottish Government will continue to provide funding for the next year to enable the five Scottish Hubs to develop and progress action plans relating to housing options and homelessness prevention. This funding equates to £30,000 per Hub per year.

REVIEWS AND COMPLAINTS

- 12.1 There was one appeal against a homelessness determination made to the Comhairle in 2016/17. This was dealt with at the first stage and did not proceed to the Appeals Board. There were no appeals against offers of permanent accommodation.
- 12.2 There were no formal complaints made about the Homelessness Service in 2016/17.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

- 13.1 The Homelessness Service User Questionnaire has 3 stages: initial interview, temporary accommodation and an exit questionnaire. Return rates are fairly low at between 17% and 6%. Of all responses, 96% were satisfied or very satisfied with their initial interview, 79% were satisfied or very satisfied with their temporary accommodation and 87.5% rated the overall service as excellent.

Chart 17 - Initial Interview satisfaction ratings 2016-2017 (23 returns)

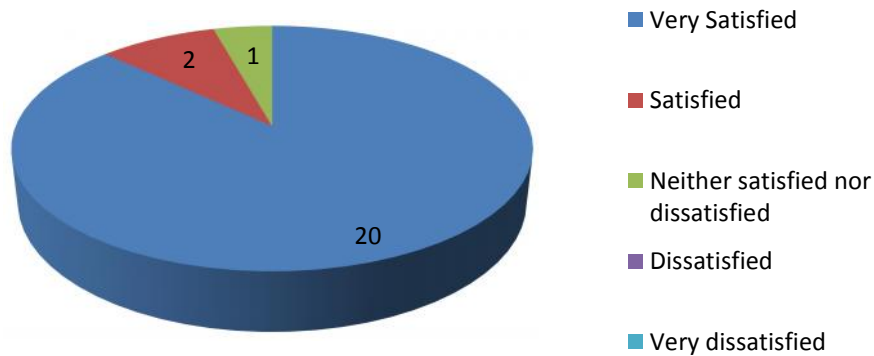


Chart 18-Temporary Accommodation satisfaction ratings 2016-2017 (19 returns)

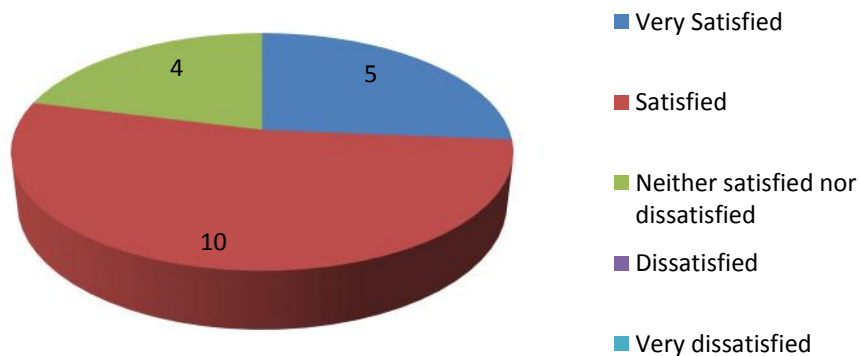
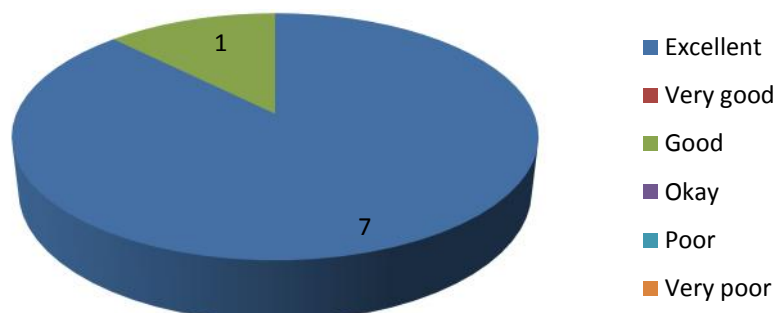


Chart 19 - Exit Questionnaire overall satisfaction ratings 2016-2017 (8 returns)



13.2 The Comhairle's homelessness standards and targets are illustrated in the table below. In 2016-2017 the Comhairle at least met 7 out of the 9 relevant targets.

Table 4 - Homelessness Performance Management Framework

Standard	Type	Actual 2014-2015	Actual 2015-2016	Target 2016-2017	Actual 2016-2017
Initial Interview					
Interview applicants within 1 working day (unless applicant specifies otherwise)	CNES ²	98%	98%	90%	98%
Determinations					
Applicants to be advised of homelessness decision within 28 days of interview	SG ³ /SHRIP ₄	75%	87%	80%	83%
Reduction in number of Lost Contacts	SHRIP	5%	1%	10%	2%
%age of priority need cases reassessed within 12 months of completion of duty	SPI ⁵	0.7%	2%	n/a	1%
Temporary Accommodation					
Roofless applicants accommodated immediately if presenting out of hours	SG	100%	100%	100%	100%
All applicants requiring temporary accommodation provided with it	SG	83%	100%	100%	100%
Breaches of unsuitable accommodation order	SG	0	0	0	0
Permanent Accommodation					
90 days to first offer	CNES	15%	22%	25%	20.5%
Second offer within 90 days of first offer	CNES	30%	40%	90%	59%
%age of priority need households housed	SPI	51%	64%	n/a	57.5%
Tenancy Sustainment for over 12 months	CNES	100%	95%	100%	100%
Appeals					
Appeal heard within 14 working days of receipt of appeal	CNES	-	-	100%	-
Applicant informed of decision within 3 working days of appeal	CNES	-	-	100%	-
Complaints					
Complainant advised of outcome within 21 days of receipt of complaint	CNES	-	-	100%	-

² Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

³ Scottish Government

⁴ Scottish Housing Regulator Improvement Plan

⁵ Statutory Performance Indicator

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 There are no financial implications relating to the Recommendations in this Report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 There are no legal implications relating to the Recommendations in this Report.

RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 16.1 There are no risk implications relating to the Recommendations in this Report.

CONCLUSION

- 17.1 Homeless applications made to the Comhairle have continued to decrease reflecting the general trend for Scotland as a whole. The Comhairle will monitor any ongoing impact of Welfare Reform and Universal Credit on the Homelessness Service.
- 17.2 The backlog of homeless households awaiting an offer of permanent accommodation has decreased but the overall length of time for homeless households to be provided with permanent accommodation has increased
- 17.3 Bed and Breakfast usage has continued to decrease as has the average length of stay in Bed and Breakfast. Lengths of stay in furnished temporary accommodation and The Acres have increased.
- 17.4 The increase in levels of applicants with mental health issues and the ongoing numbers of clients with one or more support needs are compounding the existing pressures on the Homelessness Service.
- 17.5 If the Comhairle is to continue to meet its statutory duties and provide a good service to homeless people, the Homelessness Service budget continues to be a vital resource.