



**HOUSING OPTIONS AND HOMELESSNESS ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18**

Report by Director of Development Services

**PURPOSE OF REPORT** To provide the Comhairle with an update of housing options and homelessness issues covering the year 2017/18.

**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 legal, financial, equalities or other constraints to the recommendations being implemented.

**SUMMARY**

- 2.1 In the period 1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018, a total of 130 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 18 households were assisted under the housing options approach. Of these 18, six households went on to make a homeless presentation.
- 2.2 Of all homeless applications made to the Comhairle in 2017-2018, 97 were made to Lewis (nine of which were from Harris), 22 to Uist and 11 to Barra.
- 2.3 The Comhairle accepted a duty to permanently accommodate 95 households in this period and discharged its duty to 61 households by providing them with permanent accommodation.

**RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Comhairle note the contents of this Report**

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Appendix: None

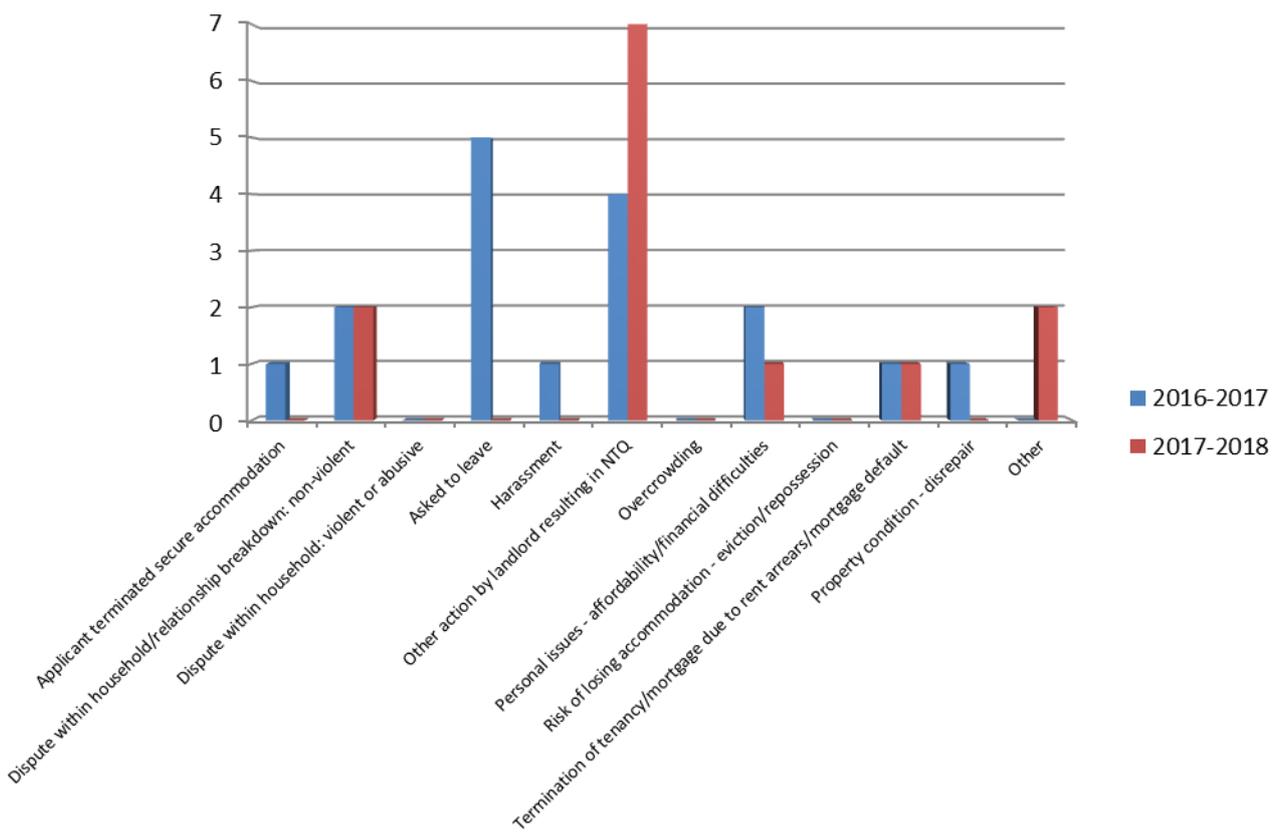
Background Papers: None



## HOUSING OPTIONS APPLICATIONS AND OUTCOMES

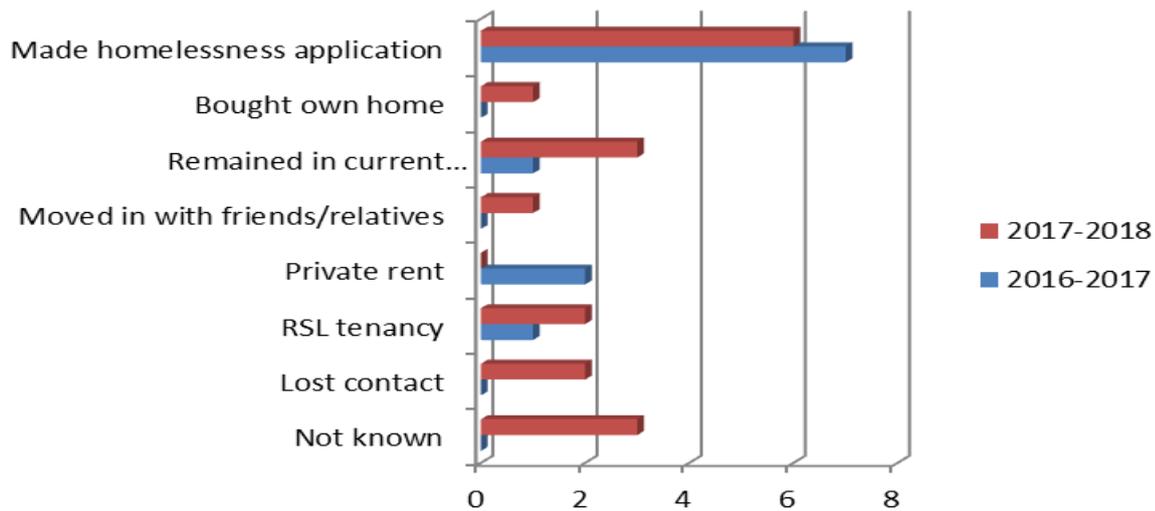
- 4.1 Any applicant threatened with homelessness presenting to the Service is offered a housing options interview in the first instance in order to attempt to prevent homelessness from happening. The Comhairle has a duty to advise all applicants of their right to a homelessness interview if that is their preferred option. During the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018, 18 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 2017-2018**



- 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 Nineteen Housing Options applications were closed during 2017-2018. Six of these went on to make a homelessness application to the Comhairle. Of all Housing Options applications made in the year, 33% went on to make a homelessness application. In Scotland, 54% of homeless applicants in 2017-2018 had made a Housing Options application prior to their homelessness application.

**Chart 2- Housing Options Outcomes in the Western Isles 2017-2018**



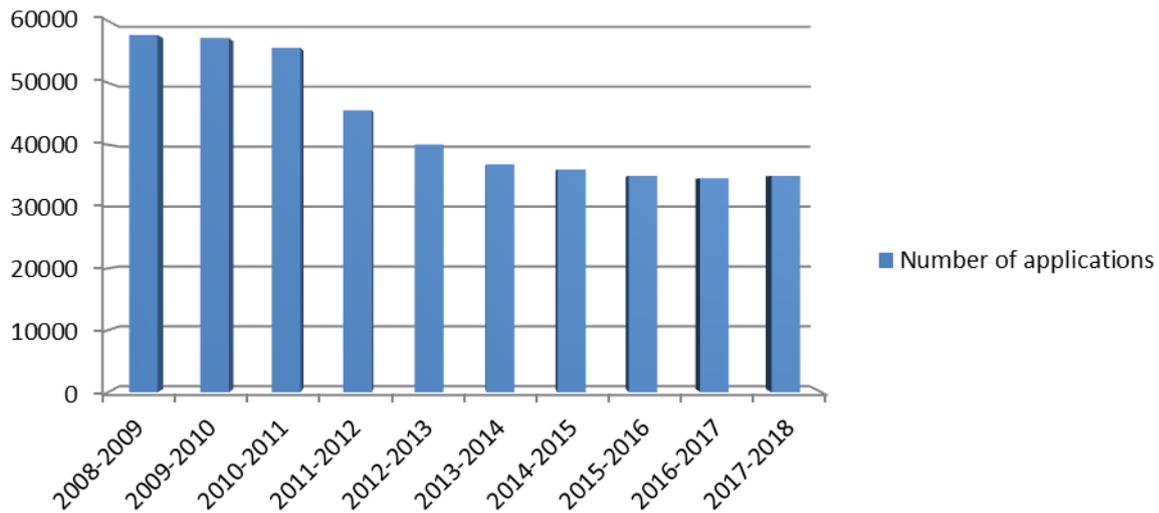
**HOMELESSNESS APPLICATIONS**

5.1 During the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018, 130 homelessness applications were made to the Comhairle consisting of 145 adults and 54 children. This is a 4% decrease on last year’s figure of 136. Applications increased in Scotland as a whole by 1% in 2017/18. This follows eight years of consecutive national annual decreases. Homelessness applications increased for 17 out of Scotland’s 32 Local Authorities in 2017/18.

**Chart 3 - Homeless and Housing Options Applications in the Western Isles 2008-2018**



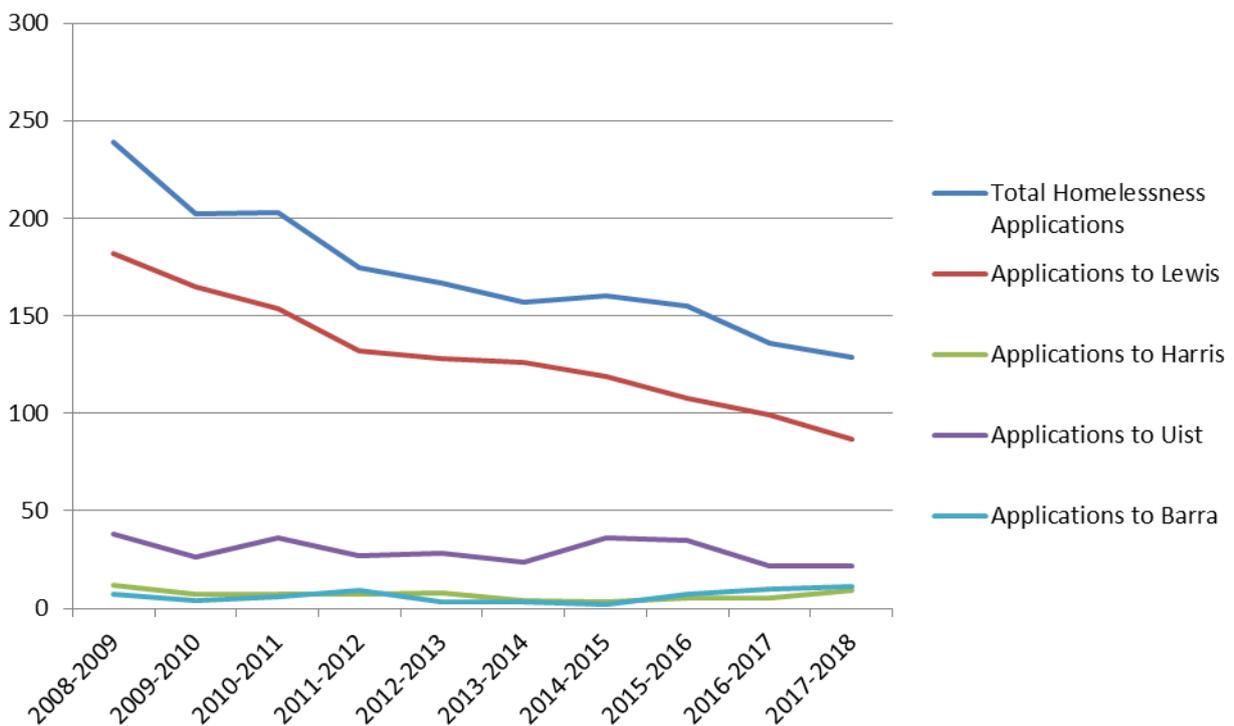
**Chart 4 - Homeless Applications in Scotland 2008-2018**



5.2 The majority of homelessness applications are made to the Stornoway Office which covers Lewis and Harris. Over this period 67.5% of presentations were from Lewis, 7% from Harris, 17% from Uist and 8.5% from Barra.

5.3 Numbers presenting in Lewis have decreased steadily over the past 10 years as shown in Chart 5 below. The overall trend in Uist, while fluctuating, is a slight decrease whilst numbers in Harris and Barra both increased last year.

**Chart 5 - Homelessness Applications in the Western Isles by area 2017-2018**

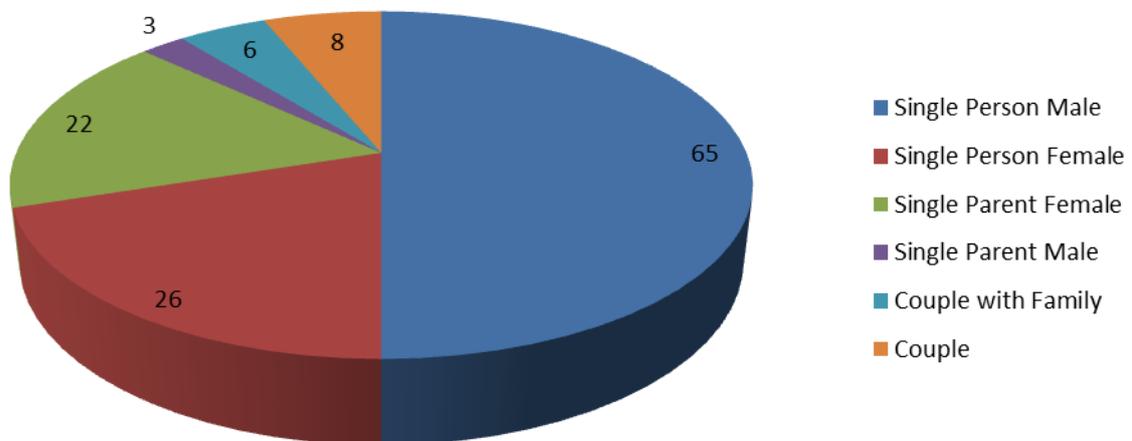


**Table 1 – Proportion of homeless presentations to total households in the Western Isles by area 2017-2018**

|  | Lewis | Harris | Uist  | Barra |
|--|-------|--------|-------|-------|
| Total number of households by area <sup>1</sup>              | 8,846 | 911    | 2,232 | 587   |
| Total number of households presenting as homeless            | 88    | 9      | 22    | 11    |
| Proportion of homeless applicants to all homeless households | 67.5% | 7%     | 17%   | 8.5%  |
| Proportion of homeless households to all households by area  | 1%    | 1%     | 1%    | 1.9%  |

- 5.4 The Comhairle’s rate of repeat homelessness in 2017-2018 was the highest for 5 years at 8%. 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 6.4%.
- 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.

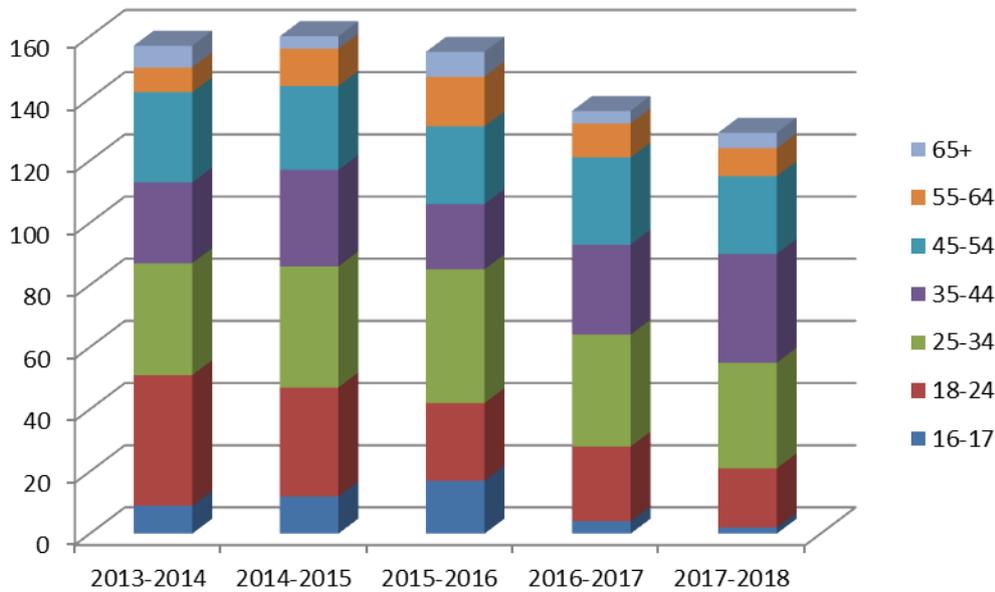
**Chart 6 – Homeless Applications in the Western Isles in 2017-2018 by Household Type**



<sup>1</sup> Data from 2011 Western Isles Census

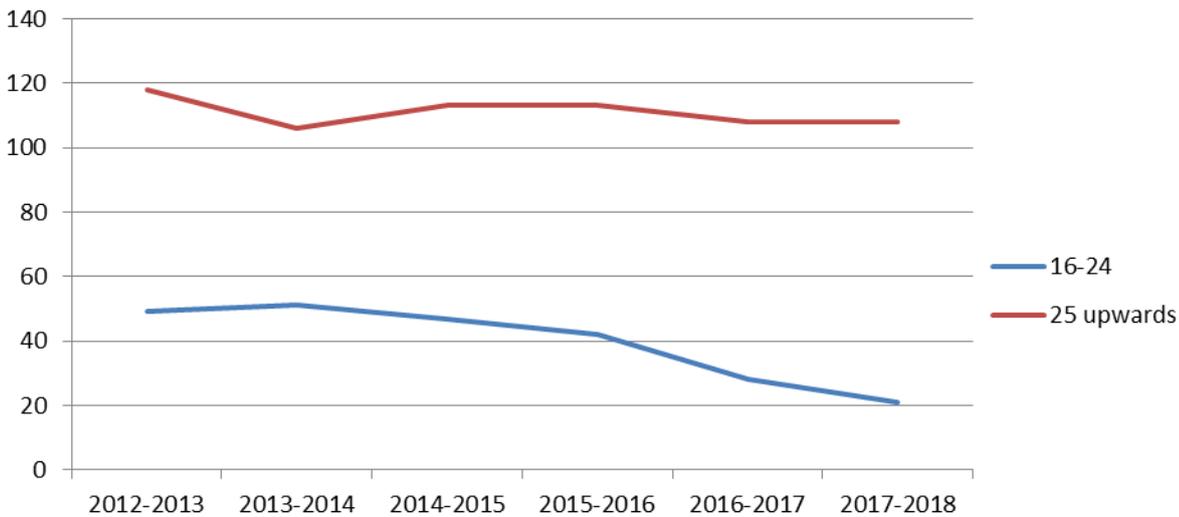
5.6 Applications can be broken down further into age ranges over the past five years for the main applicant as shown at Chart 7 below. The overall numbers of young people presenting has declined annually with only 2 aged 16-17 presenting in 2017-2018.

**Chart 7 – Homeless Age Groups 2013-2018**



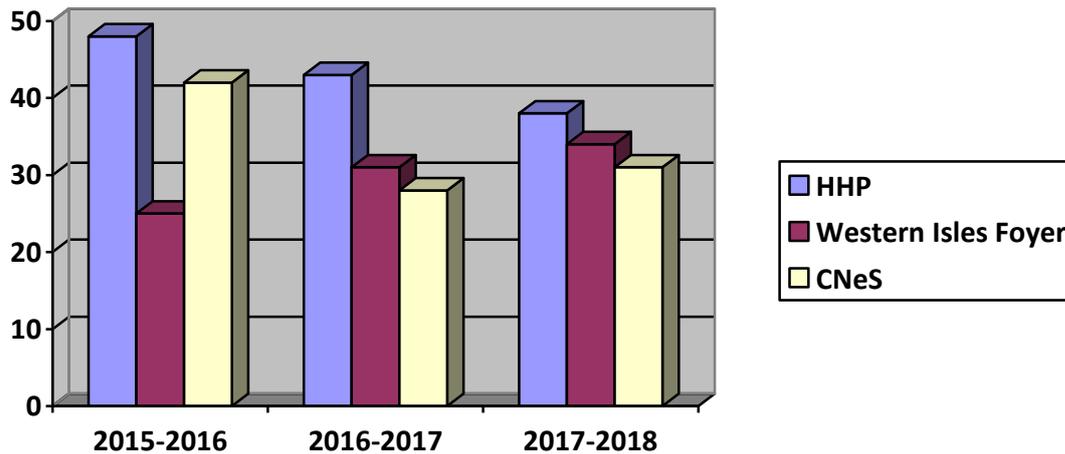
5.7 Further analysis of the statistics indicates that the reduction in homelessness presentations over the past 6 years has been almost entirely amongst young aged 16-24.

**Chart 8 – Homelessness Presentations by Age Range**



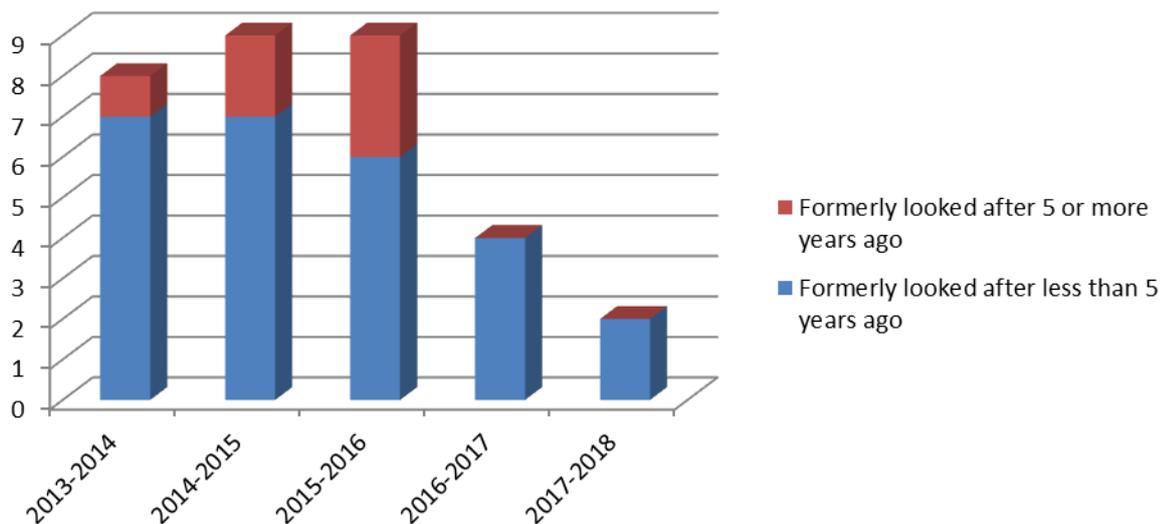
5.8 The Comhairle partners with Western Isles Foyer in providing accommodation and support to young people who are in housing need or who are homeless. A comparison of numbers of young people referring or being referred by other agencies directly to the Foyer against numbers presenting directly to the Comhairle, as shown at Chart 9, would suggest that the work of the Foyer in preventing youth homelessness is having a direct impact on the reduction in homeless presentations from young people, particularly those aged 16-17.

**Chart 9 – Numbers of Young People Seeking Housing Assistance by Agency in the Western Isles 2015 -2018**



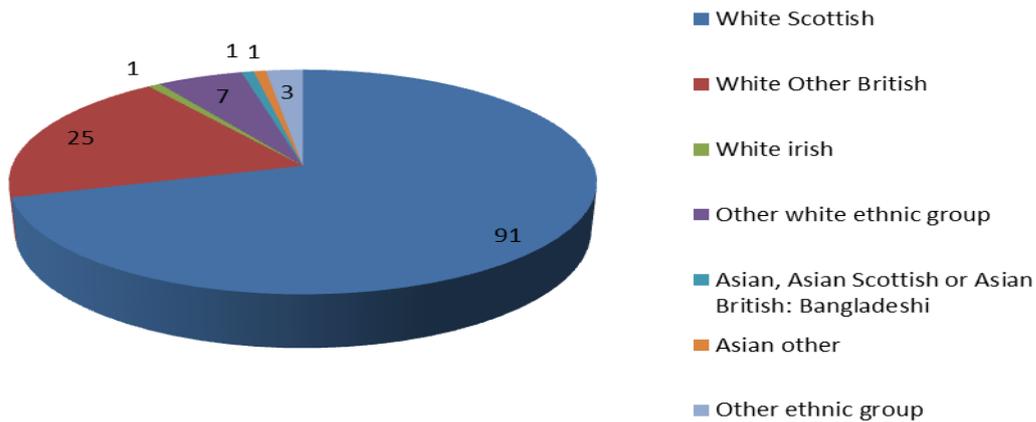
5.9 The Comhairle also records the number of care leavers presenting as homeless. In the year 2017-2018, 1.5% of applicants (2 young people) had been formerly looked after by a local authority, one by the Comhairle, in the past 5 years. This compares with the 6% of applicants who were formerly looked after children who applied as homeless across Scotland in 2017-2018.

**Chart 10 – Formerly Looked After Children Presenting as Homeless in the Western Isles 2017-2018**



5.8 The ethnic origin of homeless applicants in the Western Isles for 2017 to 2018 is shown at Chart 11 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 11 – Homeless Applications in the Western Isles by Ethnic Origin 2017 – 2018**

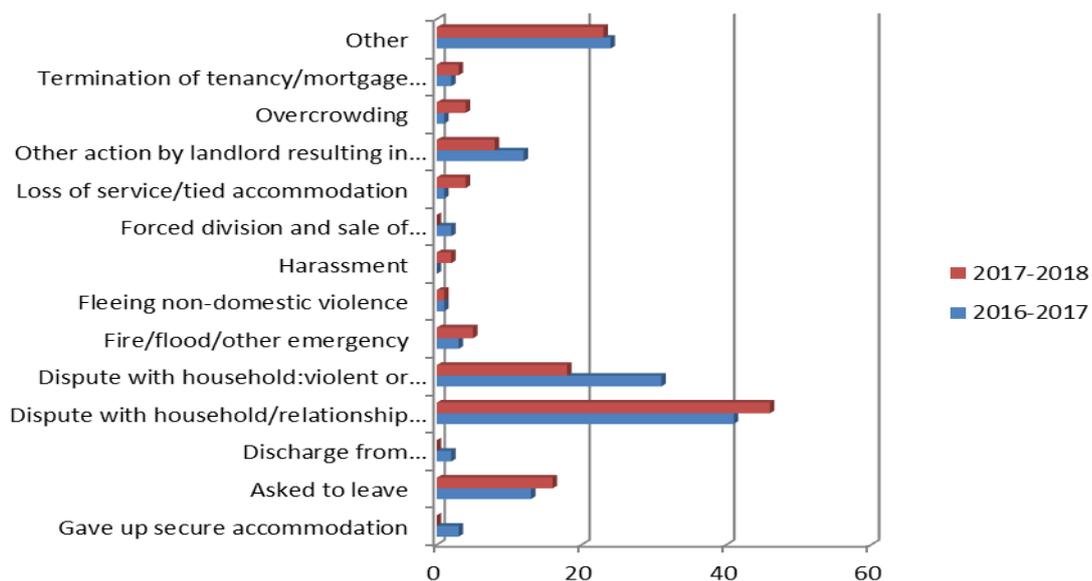


5.9 Four applicants had previously been a member of the armed services with one having served less than 5 years ago.

5.10 A further 18 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. Some applicants had slept rough in other local authority areas before presenting to the Comhairle.

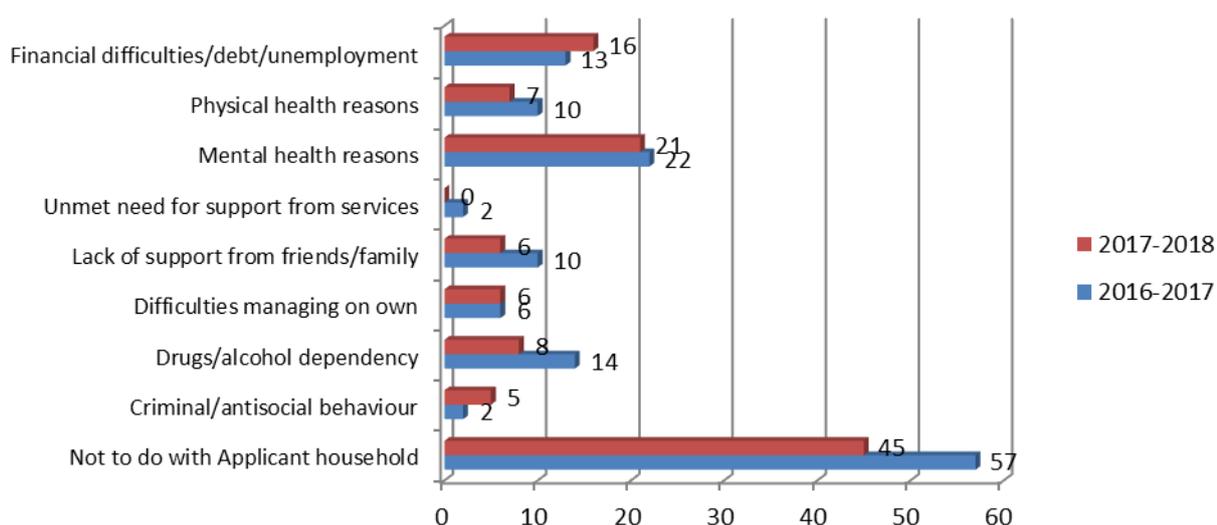
5.11 The main reason given for presenting as homeless continues to be a dispute within the household with 49% of applicants citing this as the reason for homelessness in 2017/18. Of those who presented for this reason, 28% stated that there was abuse in the relationship. Numbers of those disclosing domestic abuse decreased from 31 in 2016/17 to 18 in 2017/18. Throughout Scotland as a whole in 2017-2018, 31% of homelessness applications were because of a dispute in the household and 25% were because the applicant had been asked to leave.

**Chart 12 - Technical Reasons for Homelessness in the Western Isles 2016-2017 and 2017-2018**



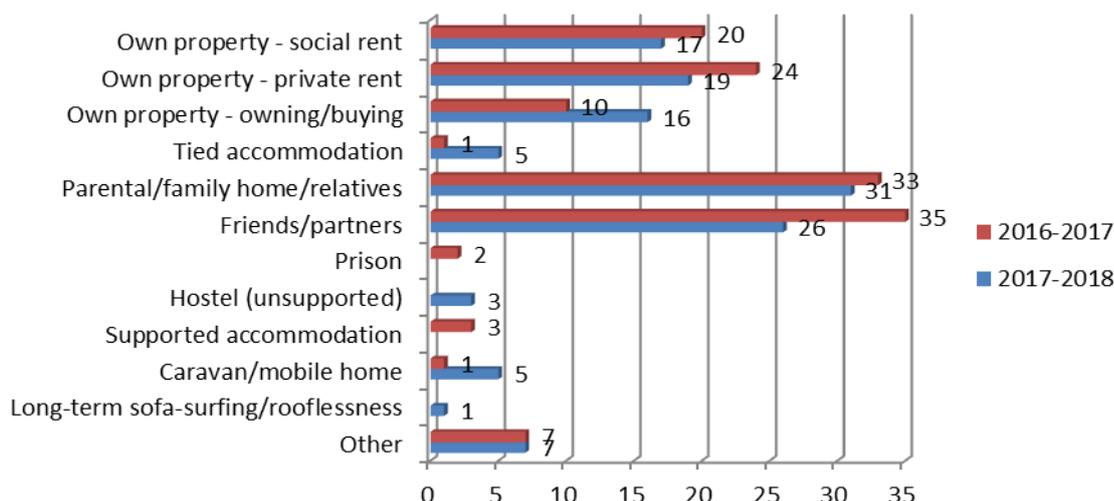
5.12 Underlying reasons for failing to maintain the household's existing accommodation are also investigated as shown at Chart 13. 12% of households stated that financial difficulties, debt or unemployment was a contributing factor to their homelessness, a slight increase on the 10% for the previous 2 years. 18% of applicants in Scotland in 2017/18 stated that this contributed to their homelessness. The Comhairle will continue to monitor the ongoing impact of Welfare Reform and Universal Credit. The main contributory factor given to the Comhairle was mental health with 16% of all applicants stating that this was a contributing factor to their homelessness, the same percentage as for the previous year. Furthermore, 50 households (38% of all applicants) were identified as requiring support due to mental health issues as shown at Table 2 on Page 13 of this report. A further 8 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 13 – Underlying reasons for failing to maintain accommodation in the Western Isles 2016-2017 and 2017-2018**



5.13 Of the 130 households who applied in 2017-2018, 57 (44%) had been living with friends or relatives while 52 (40%) had been living in their own property (i.e. which they either rented or owned).

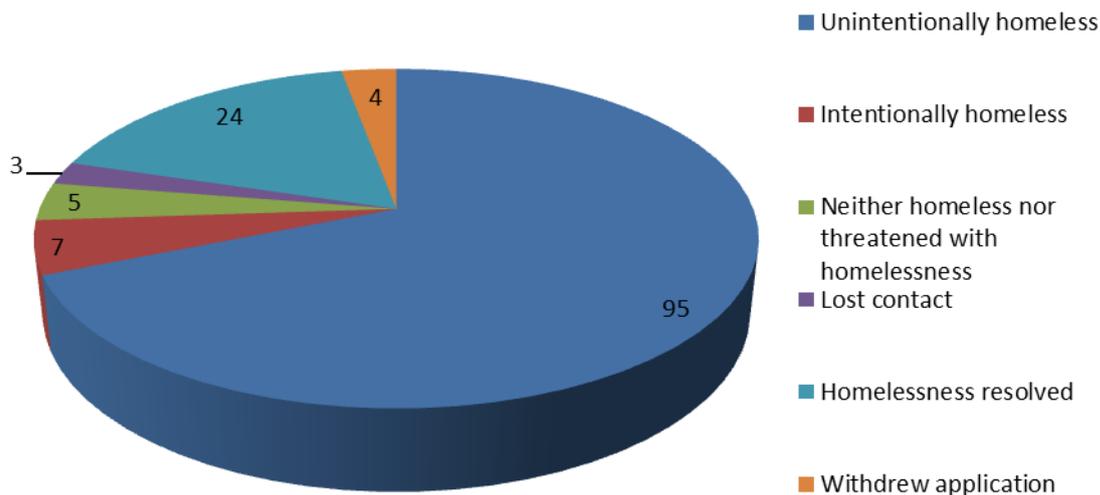
**Chart 14 – Prior housing circumstances of applicants in the Western Isles 2016-2017 and 2017-2018**



## HOMELESSNESS ASSESSMENTS

- 6.1 In the year 2017-2018, 24 households resolved their homelessness or withdrew their application prior to an assessment being made, often due to a relationship breakdown being resolved. Five households were assessed as neither homeless nor potentially homeless. Contact was lost with three households prior to an assessment decision being made. Of the remaining 102 households assessed as homeless or potentially homeless, 95 (69%) were assessed as unintentionally homeless. A further 7 (5%) were found to be intentionally homeless. For Scotland as a whole in 2017-2018, 75% of households were assessed as unintentionally homeless and 5% as intentionally homeless.

**Chart 15 – Assessments of homeless applications 2017-2018**



- 6.2 In the period 2017-2018, 14 households were assessed as unintentionally homeless with no local connection, 10% of all assessed cases. Four of these households had insecure employment and had lost their tied accommodation. Of all 14 households, 9 were provided with temporary accommodation for a reasonable period of time to allow them to secure alternative accommodation.

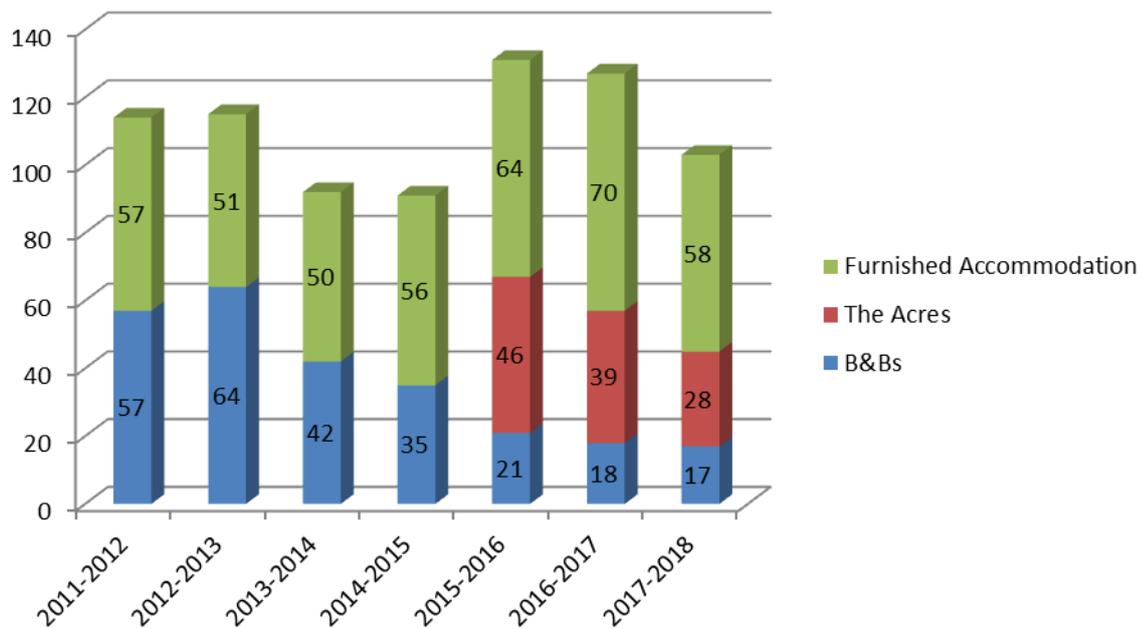
## TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

- 7.1 There are presently 65 operational homeless temporary accommodation units throughout the Western Isles with a further one in development. The Comhairle provides 38 of these from its own stock and leases a further 28 properties from HHP. The private sector lease arrangement in Barra has been ended by the landlord for personal reasons.
- 7.2 At the date of writing this report 5 households were being provided with temporary accommodation in Bed and Breakfast, all in Stornoway. 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.
- 7.3 In 2017/18, the Comhairle accommodated 17 homeless households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation with an average length of stay of 13 weeks, an increase of 42% on the length of stay for 2016/17. A further 82 households were provided with furnished temporary accommodation, 28 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 length of stay in self-contained accommodation was 48 weeks, and 20.5 weeks for

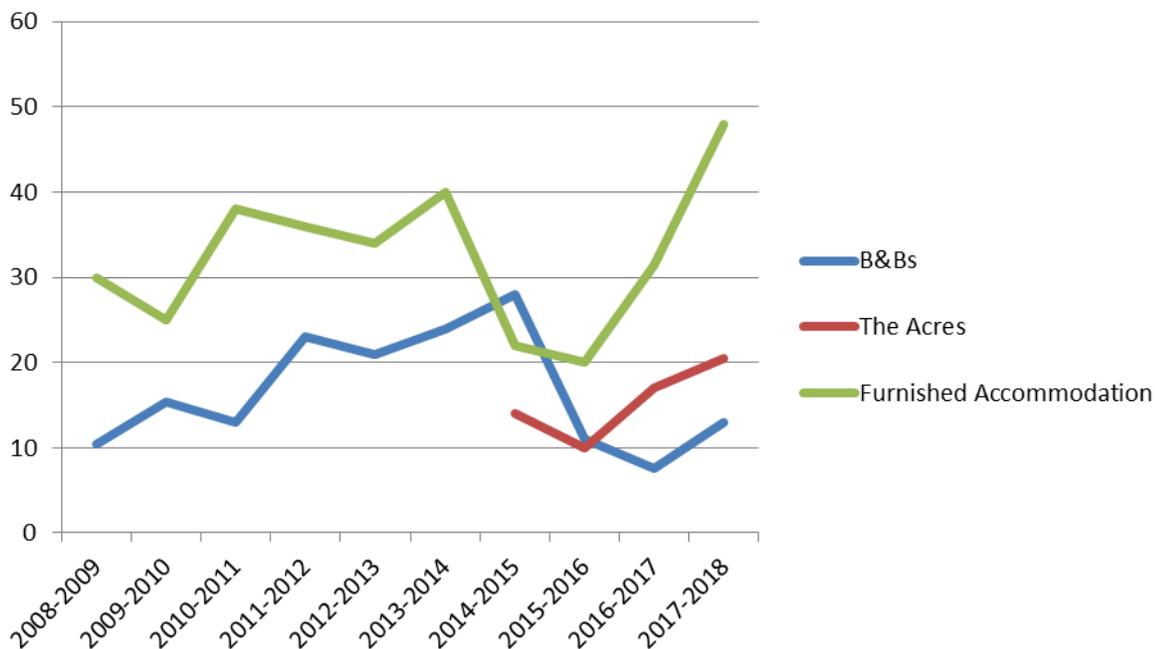
The Acres. The overall lengths of stay for households in temporary accommodation has increased due to the increasing pressure on available permanent stock, particularly for those households waiting for an offer of a 2 or 5 apartment tenancy. In 2017-2018 the Comhairle recorded the longest average lengths for the past 10 years of stay in self-contained accommodation.

7.4 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 16 – Numbers of cases closed in the year provided with temporary accommodation in the Western Isles 2011-2018**



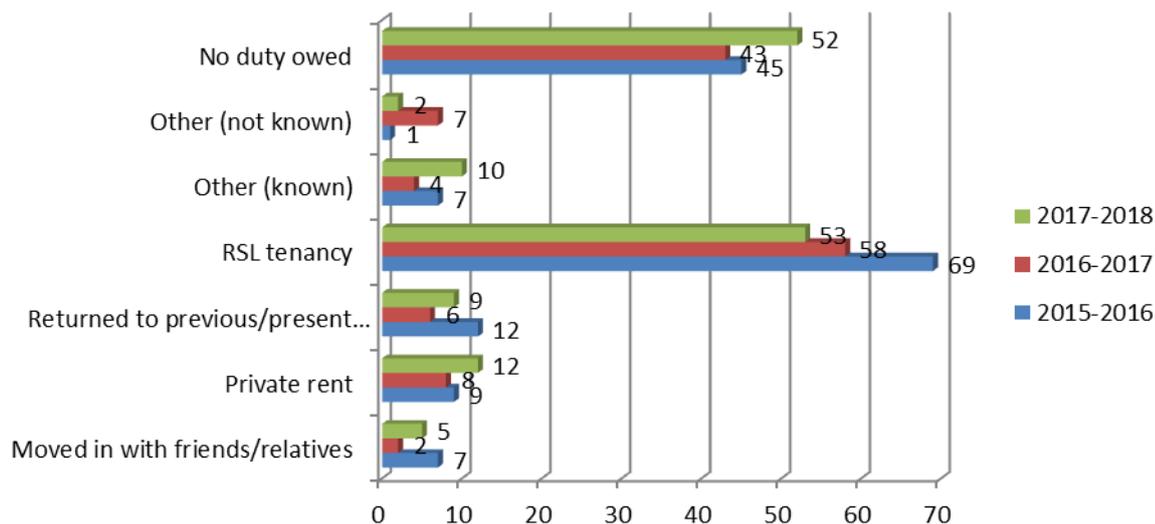
**Chart 17 – Lengths of stay in temporary accommodation in the Western Isles for closed cases 2008-2018 (weeks)**



## PERMANENT ACCOMMODATION

8.1 At the date of writing this Report, 100 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 5% increase in the numbers waiting compared to the same date in 2016/17. In this period, 53 homeless households were provided with a permanent tenancy under homelessness legislation. This figure represents 24.5% of all allocations made in the Western Isles, a decrease of 12.5% of all allocations made in the preceding year. Chart 18 shows the housing outcomes for all cases closed in 2015/16 to 2017/18

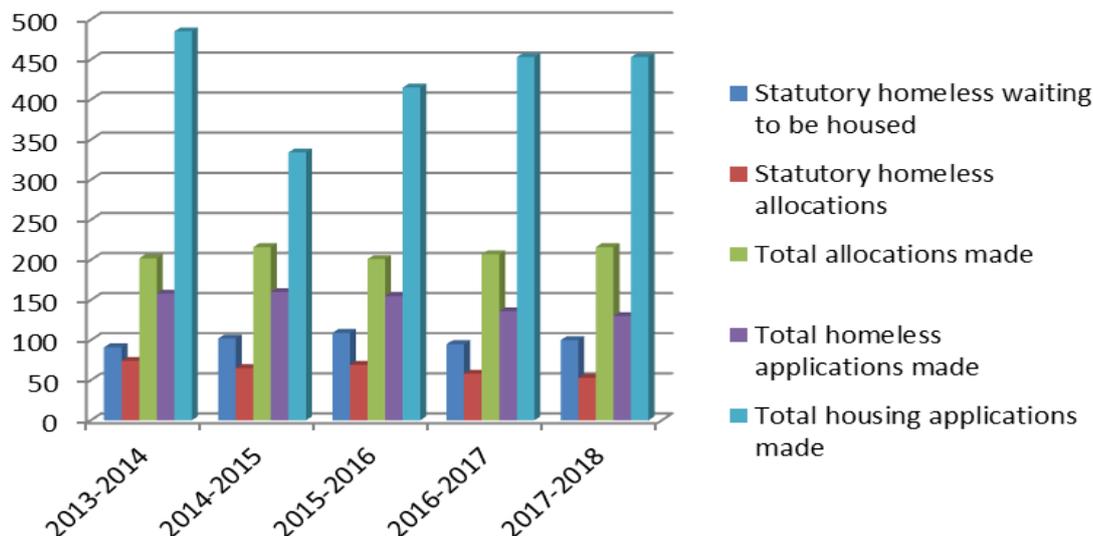
**Chart 18 - Known outcomes for homeless households in the Western Isles for cases closed in 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18.**



8.2 Stornoway continues to be the most pressurised area. Of all social housing allocations made in 2017/18 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 43 statutory homeless households are awaiting a two apartment property where Stornoway is their first area of choice, compared with 9 awaiting a 3 apartment in Stornoway, 7 awaiting a 4 apartment and 3 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 373 days in 2017/18, an 8% increase on the time taken in 2016/17. It took an average of 392 days, a 7% increase on the preceding year, for all priority homeless households to be housed as 7 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 2017/18, 26% of first offers were made within 3 months. 20% of first offers were made within three months across Lewis and Harris, and 42% 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 19 below illustrates the pressures on waiting lists.

**Chart 19 - Housing and homelessness trends 2013-2018**



### 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 2017/18 there were 35 new referrals made to this service.
- 9.2 Tenancy sustainment levels continue to be high with 80% of homeless applicants housed permanently under homelessness legislation in 2016-2017 sustaining their tenancy for more than one year. (Of the 10 tenancies that were not sustained only 3 would be classed as a failed tenancy as there were valid reasons for the other tenants moving to alternative accommodation). For all households housed by HHP in 2016-2017, 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 2017-2018 the Comhairle assisted 10 households by providing second hand furniture and is working with Scottish Churches Housing Action to revitalise the local starter pack scheme.

### 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, Western Isles Foyer, the Trussell Trust Food Bank, Hebrides Alpha, Dochas and local Churches.

**Table 2 – Support needs as identified by household when making homeless application 2015-2018**

| Support Need                                       | Number of applicants |           |           |
|--|----------------------|-----------|-----------|
|  | 2015-2016            | 2016-2017 | 2017-2018 |
| Mental health                                      | 43                   | 49        | 50        |
| Learning disability                                | 14                   | 11        | 8         |
| Physical disability                                | 21                   | 16        | 10        |
| Medical condition                                  | 36                   | 29        | 19        |
| Drug or alcohol dependency                         | 24                   | 25        | 24        |
| Basic housing management/independent living skills | 11                   | 12        | 5         |

10.3 Of all households who identified a support need, 31 had more than one need, 24% of all homeless households.

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 In 2017/18 69 food vouchers (including 46 Christmas food parcels) were issued for the Trussell Trust Food Bank operated by New Wine Church, a 38% decrease on the previous year's figure of 112. The Comhairle canteen continues to provide leftover hot food to The Acres' residents, Monday to Friday, and Tesco provide produce due to go out of date on a Saturday night.

### **HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING OPTIONS HUB**

11.1 The Comhairle participates in the North & Islands Homelessness and Housing Options Hub which aims to meet at least quarterly. The main focus of the Hub over the past number of years has been preventing homelessness through the development of a housing options approach. While homelessness prevention will remain a priority for the Hub, the current focus is the recommendations of the Scottish Governments' Homelessness and Rough Sleepers' Action Group and the development of Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans as detailed in a concurrent report to this Committee. 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**

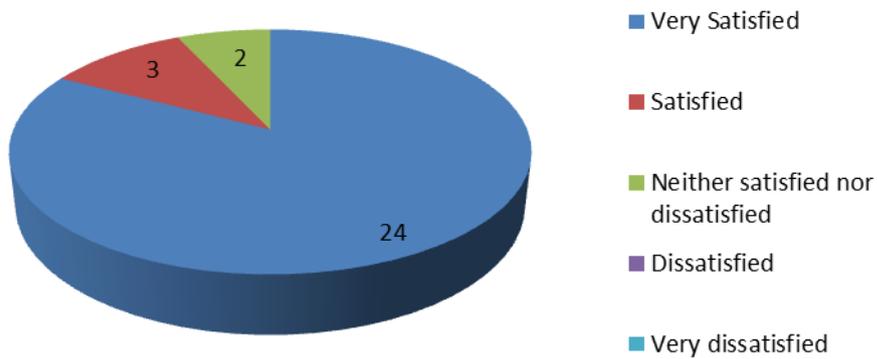
12.1 There were two appeals against homelessness determinations in 2017/18. These were both dealt with at the first stage and did not proceed to the Appeals Board. There were no appeals against offers of permanent accommodation.

12.2 There were no formal complaints made about the Homelessness Service in 2017/18.

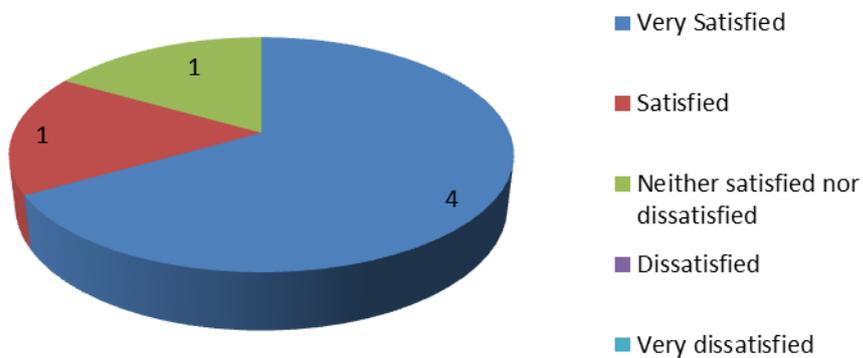
### **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

13.1 The Homelessness Service User Questionnaire has 3 stages: initial interview, temporary accommodation and an exit questionnaire. Return rates are variable at between 22% and 6%. Of all responses, 93% were satisfied or very satisfied with their initial interview, 83% were satisfied or very satisfied with their temporary accommodation and 100% rated the overall service as excellent or very good as shown in the following charts:

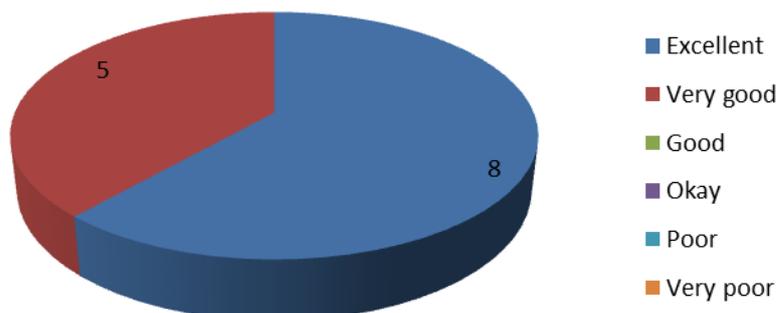
**Chart 20 - Initial Interview satisfaction ratings 2017-2018 (29 returns)**



**Chart 21-Temporary Accommodation satisfaction ratings 2017-2018 (6 returns)**



**Chart 22 - Exit Questionnaire overall satisfaction ratings 2017-2018 (13 returns)**



13.2 The Comhairle's homelessness standards and targets are illustrated in the table below. In 2017-2018 the Comhairle at least met 7 out of the 9 relevant targets.

**Table 3- Homelessness Performance Management Framework**

| Standard   | Type                                | Actual 2015-2016 | Actual 2016-2017 | Target 2017-2018 | Actual 2017-2018 |
|--|-------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>Initial Interview</b>   |                                     |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| Interview applicants within 1 working day (unless applicant specifies otherwise) | CNES <sup>2</sup>                   | 98%              | 98%              | 90%              | 96%              |
| <b>Determinations</b>  |                                     |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| Applicants to be advised of homelessness decision within 28 days of interview    | SG <sup>3</sup> /SHRIP <sup>4</sup> | 87%              | 83%              | 80%              | 80%              |
| Reduction in number of Lost Contacts   | SHRIP                               | 1%               | 2%               | 10%              | 2%               |
| %age of priority need cases reassessed within 12 months of completion of duty    | SPI <sup>5</sup>                    | 2%               | 1%               | n/a              | 6%               |
| <b>Temporary Accommodation</b>   |                                     |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| Roofless applicants accommodated immediately if presenting out of hours          | SG                                  | 100%             | 100%             | 100%             | 100%             |
| All applicants requiring temporary accommodation provided with it                | SG                                  | 100%             | 100%             | 100%             | 100%             |
| Breaches of unsuitable accommodation order                                       | SG                                  | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                |
| <b>Permanent Accommodation</b>   |                                     |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| 90 days to first offer   | CNES                                | 22%              | 20.5%            | 25%              | 26%              |
| Second offer within 90 days of first offer                                       | CNES                                | 40%              | 59%              | 90%              | 57%              |
| %age of priority need households housed  | SPI                                 | 64%              | 57.5%            | n/a              | 64%              |
| Tenancy Sustainment for over 12 months   | CNES                                | 95%              | 100%             | 100%             | 95%              |
| <b>Appeals</b>   |                                     |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| Appeal heard within 14 working days of receipt of appeal                         | CNES                                | -                | -                | 100%             | -                |
| Applicant informed of decision within 3 working days of appeal                   | CNES                                | -                | -                | 100%             | -                |
| <b>Complaints</b>  |                                     |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| Complainant advised of outcome within 21 days of receipt of complaint            | CNES                                | -                | -                | 100%             | -                |

<sup>2</sup> Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Government

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Housing Regulator Improvement Plan

<sup>5</sup> 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 Homelessness applications in the Western Isles have decreased for the third consecutive year. Homelessness applications in Scotland as a whole increased by 1% last year.

17.2 The number of homeless households awaiting an offer of permanent accommodation has increased, as has the average length of time taken for homeless households to be provided with permanent accommodation.

17.3 Average lengths of stay in temporary accommodation have increased across all accommodation types.

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.