



ENVIRONMENT AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES COMMITTEE: 22 SEPTEMBER 2015

## HOMELESS ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15

Report by Director for Development

**PURPOSE OF REPORT** To provide the Comhairle with an update of homelessness issues covering the year 2014/15.

### 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 recommendation being implemented.
- 1.3 There are no Equalities issues arising from the Report.

### SUMMARY

- 2.1 In the period 1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015, a total of 160 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 20 households were assisted under the housing options approach. Of these twenty, six households went on to make a homeless presentation.
- 2.2 Of all homeless applications made to the Comhairle in 2013-2014, 122 were made to Lewis (3 of which were from Harris), 36 to Uist and 2 to Barra.
- 2.3 The Comhairle accepted a duty to permanently accommodate 127 households in this period and discharged its duty to 65 households by providing them with permanent accommodation.

### RECOMMENDATION

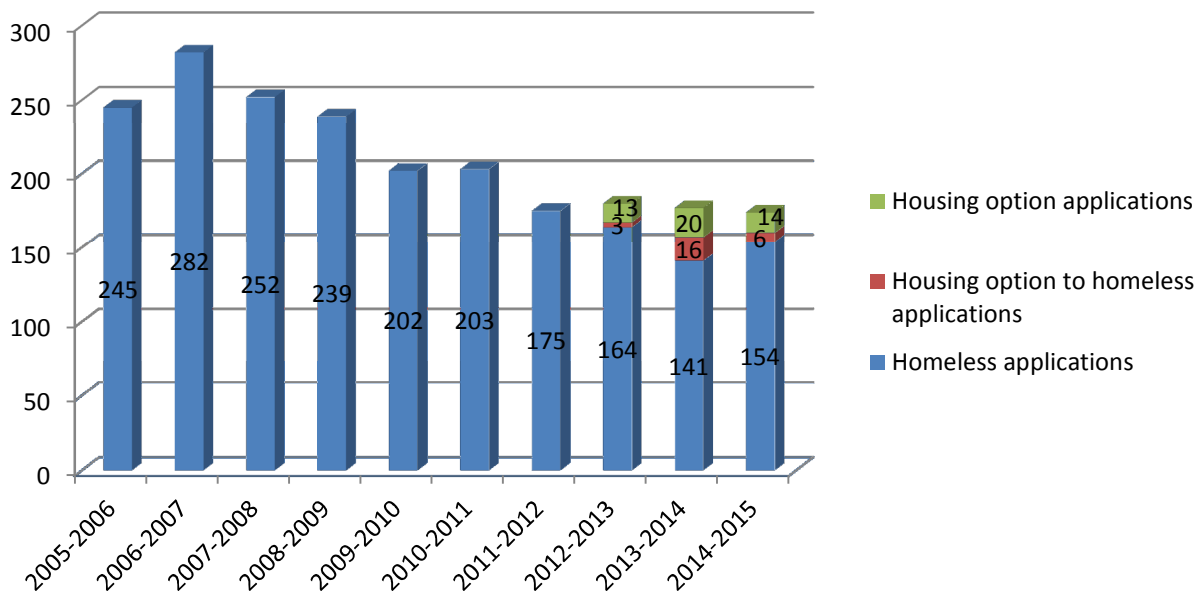
- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle notes the contents of this Report.**

Contact Officer:	Lorraine Graham	Tel. 01851-822821	Ext. 211337
Appendices:	None		
Background Papers:	None.		

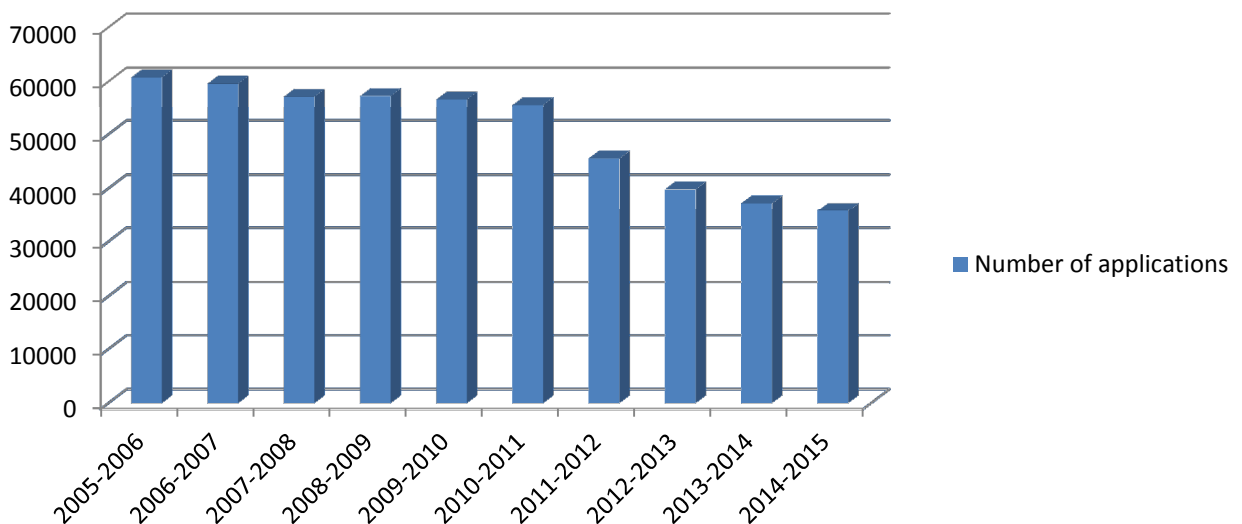
## HOMELESS APPLICATIONS

- 4.1 During the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015, 160 homelessness applications were made to the Comhairle consisting of 181 adults and 66 children. This is a 1.25% increase on last year's figure of 158.
- 4.2 The initial significant reduction in homelessness figures for Scotland, following the introduction of a housing options approach, is now slowing. Although homelessness applications fell by 4% across Scotland in 2014 to 2015, applications increased for 13 authorities, including the Comhairle.
- 4.3 20 households were assisted through the housing options approach with 6 of these households going on to make a homeless presentation. If the remaining 14 households had been interviewed as a homeless interview then the figure of homeless presentations for 2014 to 2016 would have been 174 households.

**Chart 1 - Homeless Applications in the Western Isles 2005-2015**



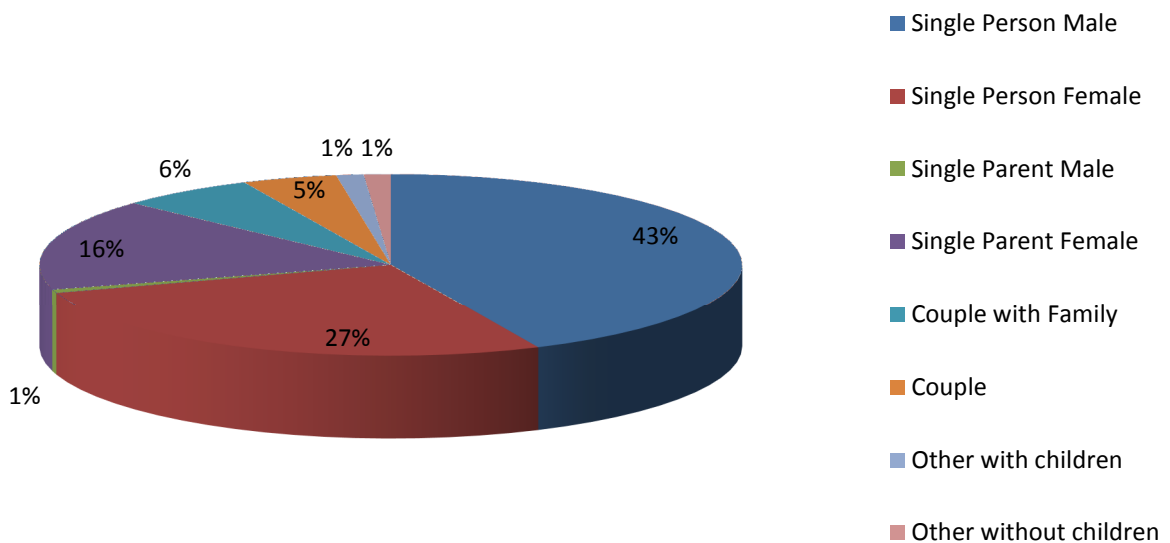
**Chart 2 - Homeless Applications in Scotland 2005-2015**



4.4 The majority of presentations continue to be made to Stornoway. Proportions presenting have remained fairly consistent across the area offices. Over this period 74.5% of presentations were from Lewis, 2% from Harris, 22.5% from Uist and 1% from Barra.

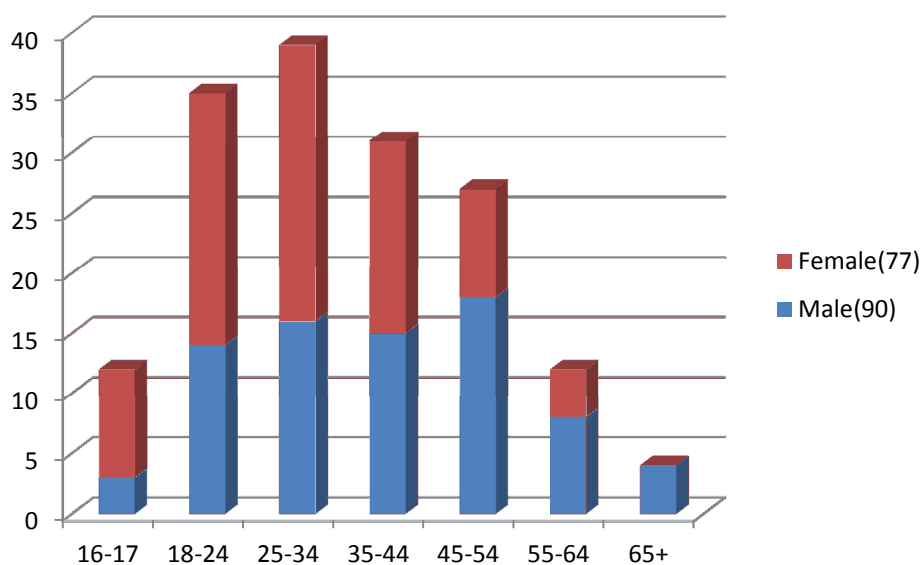
4.5 Household types presenting in the Western Isles generally remain consistent proportionately locally and nationally. The main household type presenting continues to be single people with 43% of applications being made by single men and 27% by single women.

**Chart 3 – Homeless Applications in the Western Isles in 2014-2015 by Household Type**



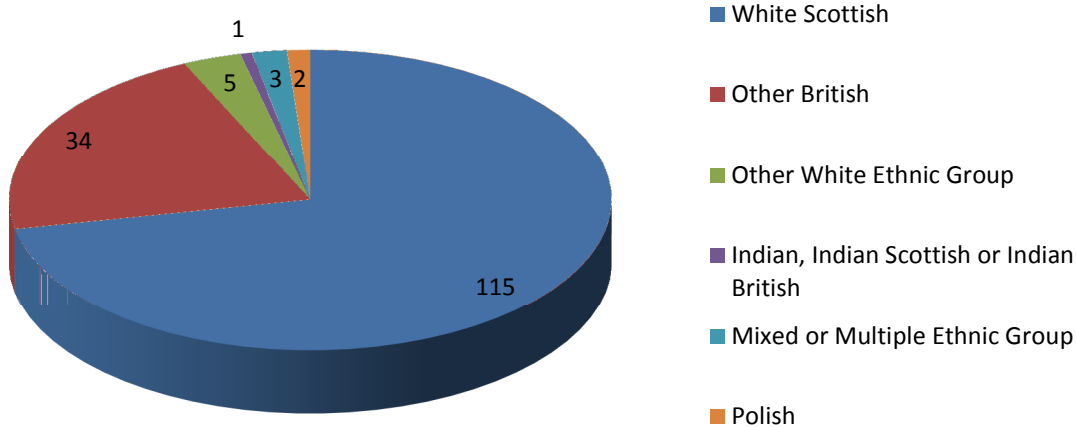
4.6 Applications can be broken down further into age ranges as shown below.

**Chart 4 – Homeless Age Groups by Gender 2014-2015**



4.7 The ethnic origin of homeless applicants in the Western Isles for 2014 to 2015 is shown at Chart 5 below. No applicants described themselves as a gypsy/traveller. A further 10 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 5 – Homeless Applications in the Western Isles by Ethnic Origin 2014-2015**



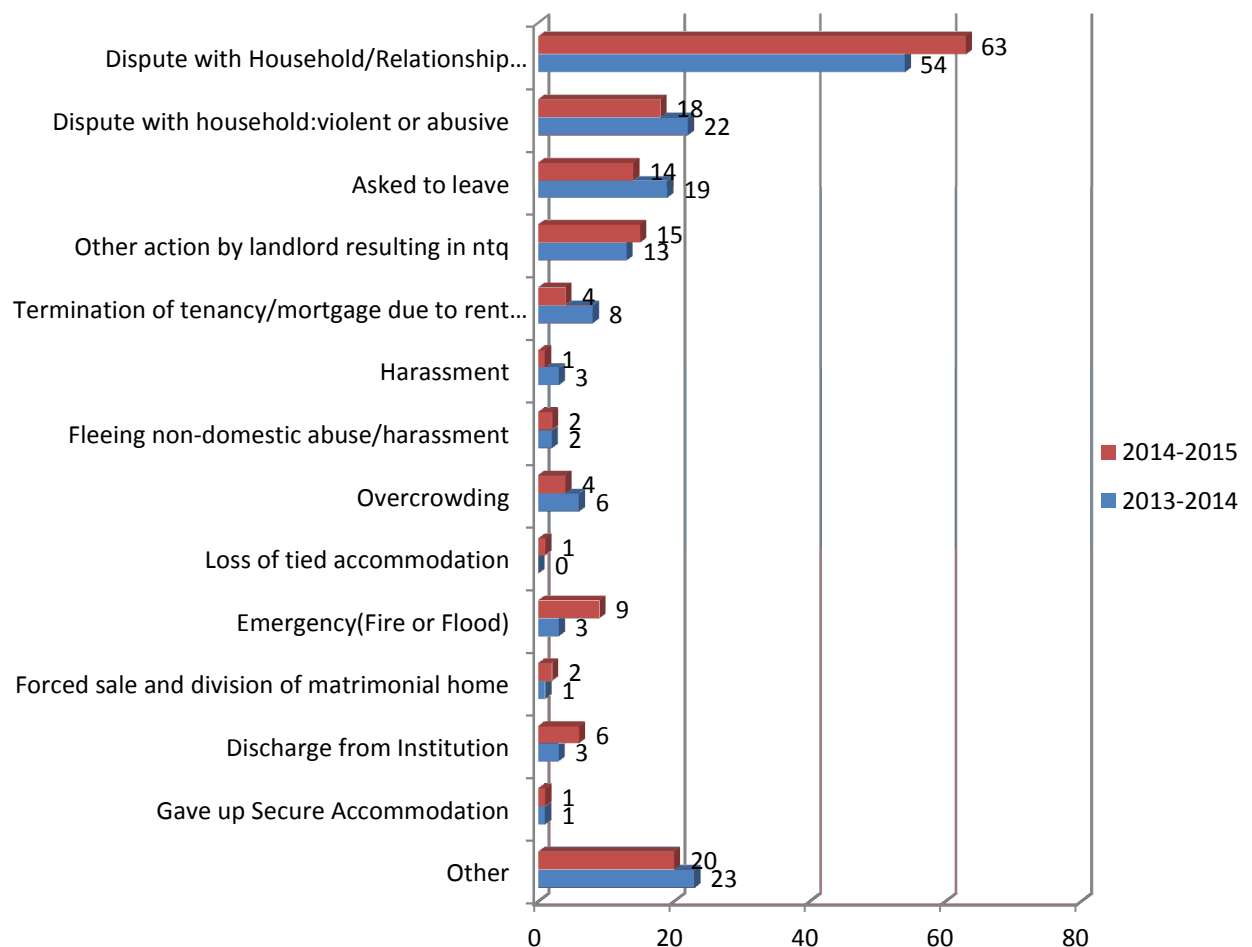
4.8 Of those applying, 9 young people stated that they had formerly been looked after by a local authority. Seven of these had been looked after less than 5 years ago.

4.9 Seven applicants had previously been a member of the armed services although all had served more than 5 years ago.

4.10 A further 8 applicants stated that they had slept rough in the 3 months preceding making a homeless application, with 5 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.

4.11 The main reason given for presenting as homeless continues to be a dispute within the household with 50% of applicants citing this as the reason for homelessness in 2014-2015. Of those who presented for this reason, 29% stated that there was abuse in the relationship. Numbers of those disclosing domestic abuse fell from 22 households in 2013-2014 to 18 in 2014-2015. Throughout Scotland as a whole in 2014-2015, 29% of homelessness applications were because of a dispute in the household and 25% were because the applicant had been asked to leave.

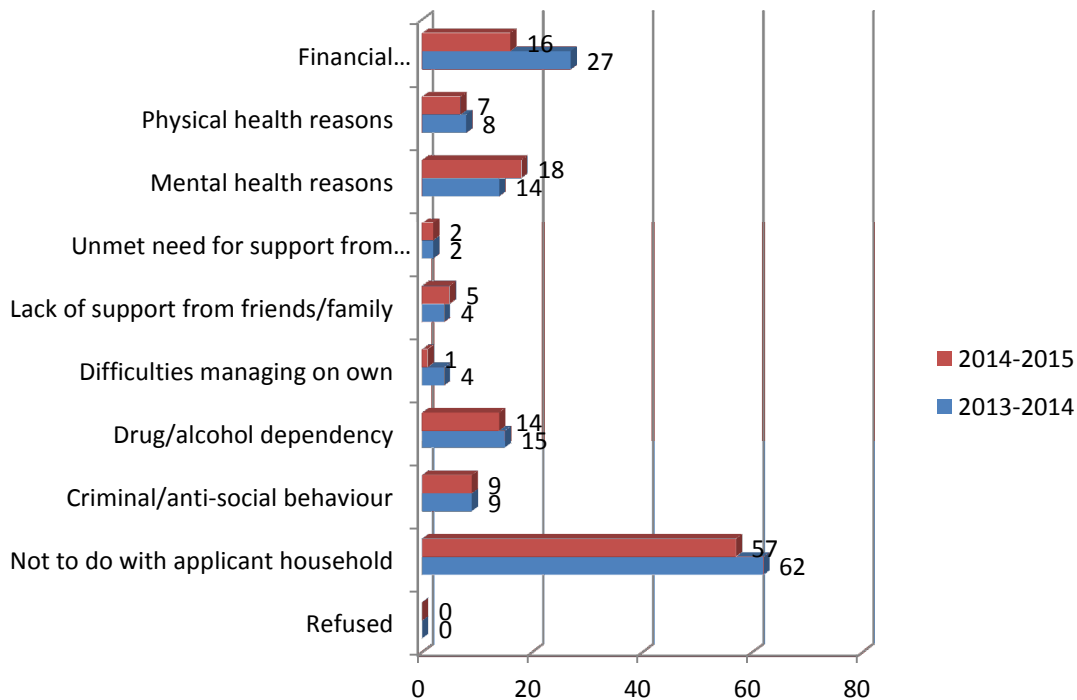
**Chart 6 - Technical Reasons for Homelessness in the Western Isles 2013-2014 and 2014-2015**



4.12 Underlying reasons for failing to maintain the household's existing accommodation are also investigated. Interestingly, since this question started being asked in 2007, 2014-2015 saw the least number of households stating that financial difficulties, debt or unemployment was a contributing factor to their homelessness. Of all households, 10% gave this as a reason last year compared to 17% in the preceding year. This figure also reduced nationally by 3%. The actual number of households presenting as a result of rent arrears or mortgage default decreased from 5% to 2.5%, again reflecting the national trend.

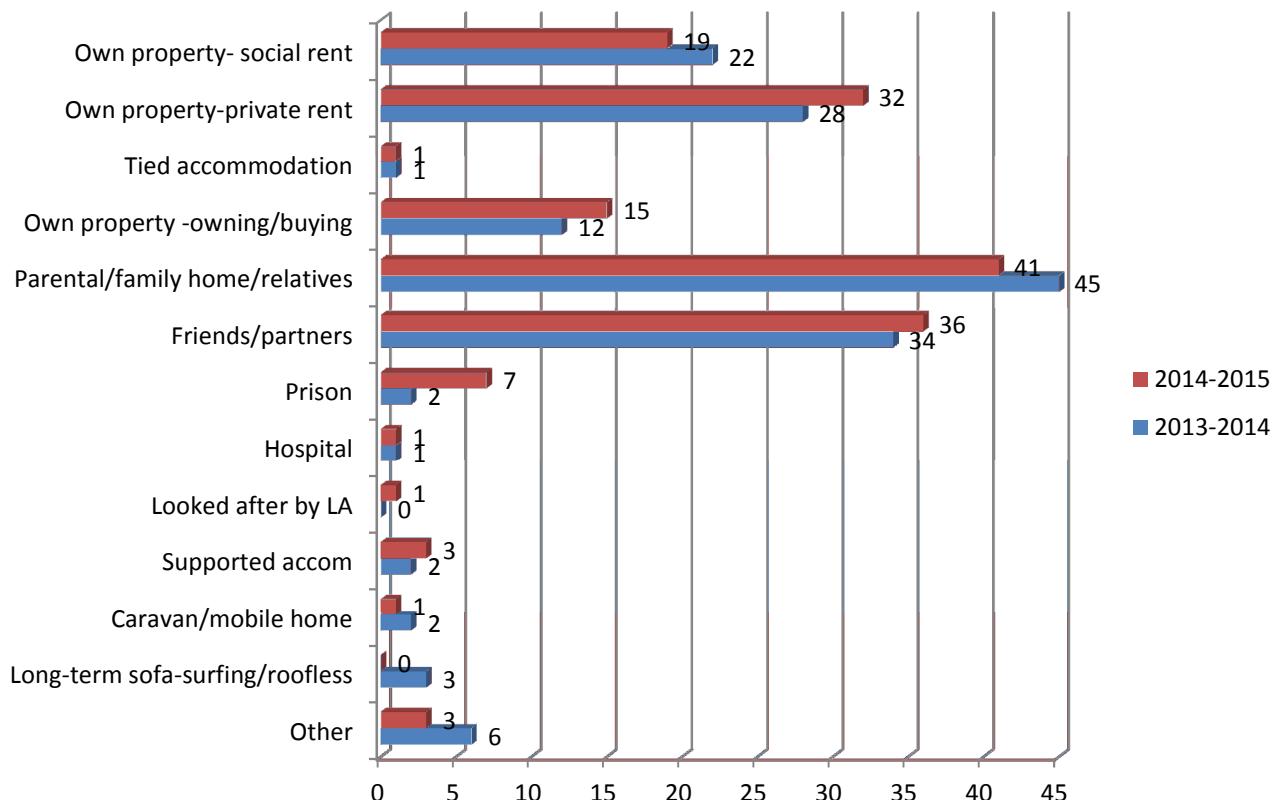
4.13 Of all households who gave underlying reasons, the main contributory factor given was mental health with 11% of applicants identifying this as an underlying cause. Although only 18 households identified mental health as a contributory factor to their homelessness, a total of 43 households stated that they required support because of their mental health as shown in Table 3 on page 11 of this report. The increasing number of households with mental health issues (9% more than the preceding year) has compounded existing pressures on the Service both for staff and resources.

**Chart 7 – Underlying reasons for failing to maintain accommodation in the Western Isles 2013-2014 and 2014-2015**



4.14 Of the 160 households who applied in 2014-2015, 76 (48%) had been living with friends and relatives while 67 (42%) had been living in their own property (i.e. which they either rented or owned).

**Chart 8 – Prior housing circumstances of applicants in the Western Isles 2013-2014 and 2014-2015**



## HOMELESS ASSESSMENTS

- 5.1 In the year 2014-2015, 21 households resolved their homelessness or withdrew their application prior to an assessment being made, often due to a relationship breakdown being resolved. One household was assessed as neither homeless nor potentially homeless. Contact was lost with 8 households and one household was ineligible for assistance. Of the remaining 135 households assessed as homeless or potentially homeless, 126 were assessed as unintentionally homeless. A further 9 were found to be intentionally homeless.

**Table 1 – Assessments of homeless applications 2012-2015**

	2012-2013		2013-2014		2014-2015	
	CNES	Scotland	CNES	Scotland	CNES	Scotland
<b>Unintentionally homeless</b>	58%	72%	68%	76%	76%	77%
<b>Intentionally homeless</b>	5%	4%	7.5%	5%	5%	5%
<b>Assessed as not homeless</b>	6.5%	5%	0.7%	5%	0.6%	4%
<b>Lost contact, withdrew etc.</b>	20%	15%	23%	14%	17.5%	13%
<b>All assessments</b>	171	40,162	147	37,169	166	35,886

- 5.2 In the period 2014-2015, two households were assessed as unintentionally homeless with no local connection. One household spent a short period of time in temporary accommodation before moving away.

## HOUSING OPTIONS HUB

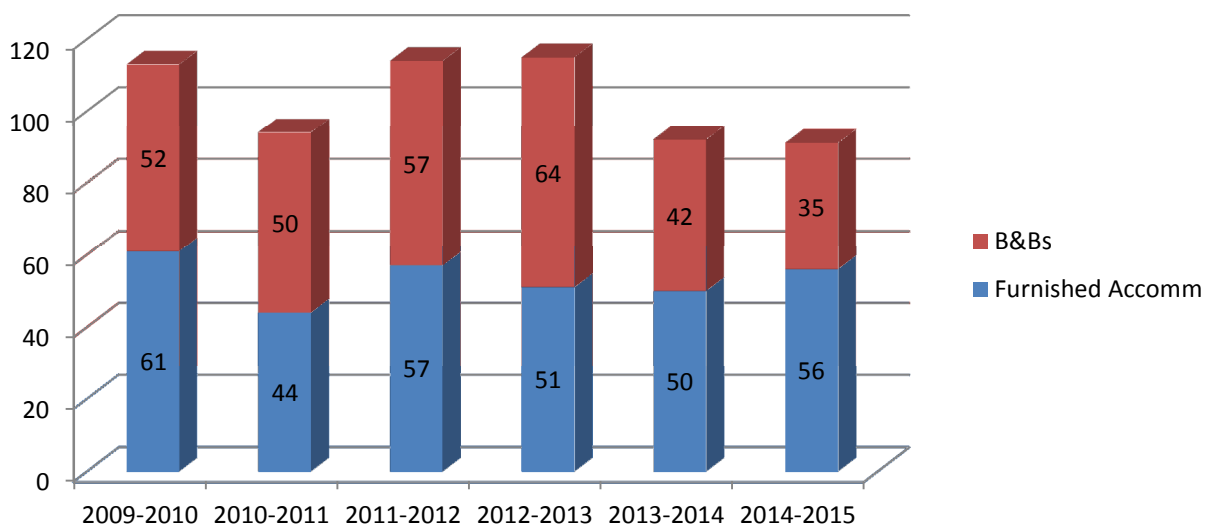
- 6.1 The Comhairle participates in the North & Islands Housing Options Hub which aims to meet at least quarterly with a view to preventing homelessness through the development of a housing options approach. The Scottish Government will continue to provide funding for the next year to enable the five 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.

## TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

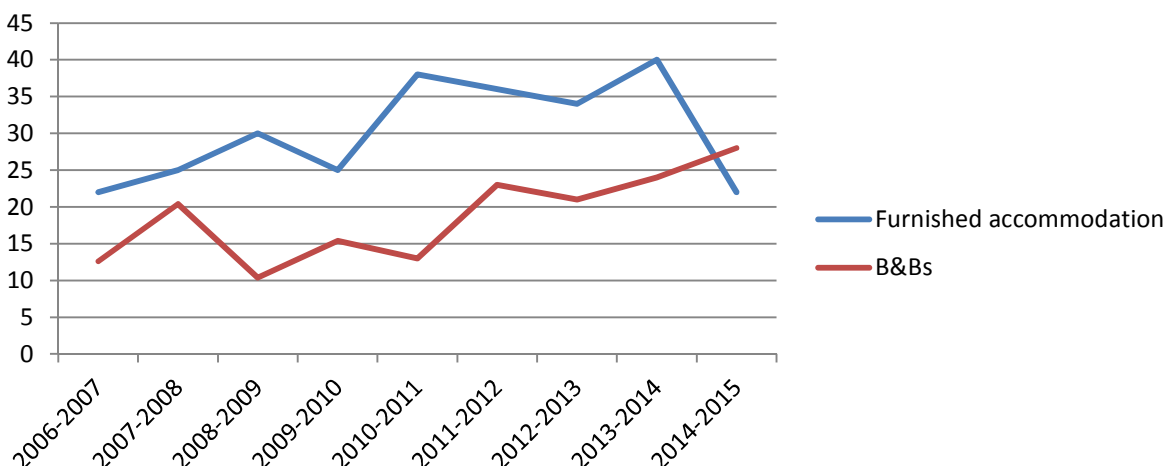
- 7.1 There are presently 74 operational homeless temporary accommodation units throughout the Western Isles. The Comhairle provides 41 of these from its own stock, leases a further 31 properties from HHP, and leases two properties in Barra from the private sector.
- 7.2 The Acres has been in operation from 1 September 2014 providing shared temporary accommodation for up to 28 residents. Residents moved from Bed and Breakfast accommodation in a phased approach with the building becoming fully operational from mid-November 2014. The impact of the Acres being fully operational hasn't yet filtered through to overall figures for temporary accommodation usage as statistics are only recorded for cases closed in the year. The Comhairle continues to depend on Bed and Breakfast establishments to meet the shortfall in temporary accommodation but this usage has reduced significantly since The Acres became operational. At the date of writing this Report the Comhairle was providing 8 households with Bed and Breakfast accommodation (3 of these in Uist), a 75% reduction from the same period last year.

- 7.3 The Comhairle continues to seek 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 2014/15, the Comhairle accommodated 35 homeless households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation with an average length of stay of 28 weeks, a 17% increase on the length of stay for 2013/14. Lengths of stay in all temporary accommodation is only recorded for cases which have been closed in the year.
- 7.5 Of all homeless households provided with Bed and Breakfast accommodation in this period, none breached the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order.
- 7.6 The Comhairle recorded a further 56 homeless households as having been provided with furnished temporary accommodation. Again it should be noted that this figure only reflects households whose cases have been closed in the year. The average length of stay in this case was 22 weeks, a 44% decrease on the preceding year. The overall lengths of stay for households in temporary accommodation is likely to increase due to the increasing pressure on available permanent stock.

**Chart 10 – Numbers of cases closed in the year provided with temporary accommodation in the Western Isles 2009-2015**



**Chart 11 – Lengths of stay in temporary accommodation in the Western Isles for closed cases 2006-2015 (weeks)**

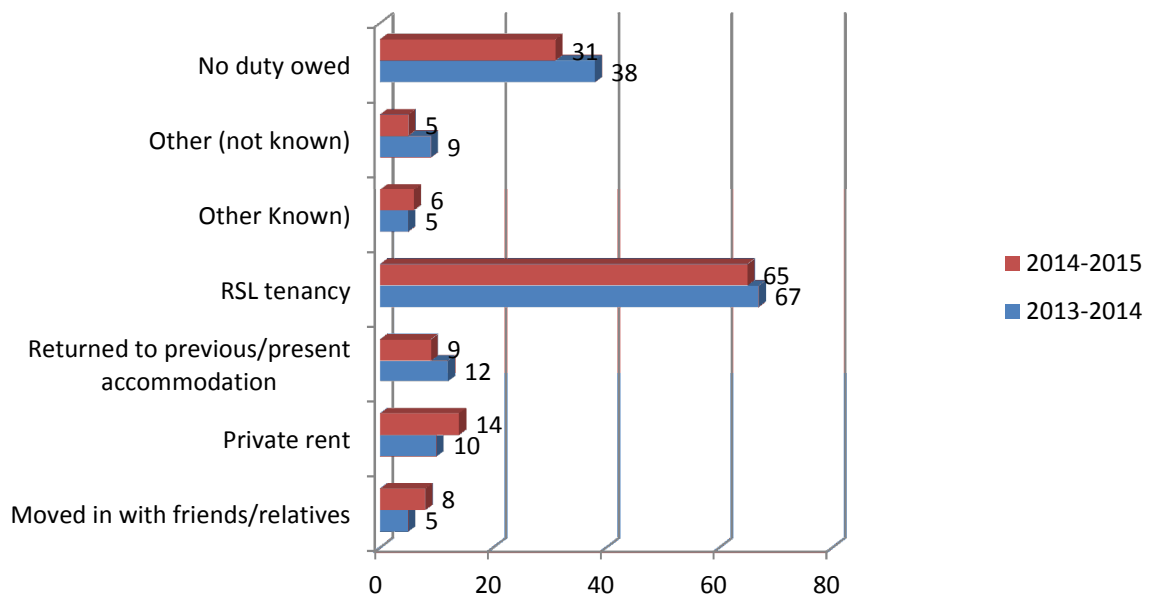




## PERMANENT ACCOMMODATION

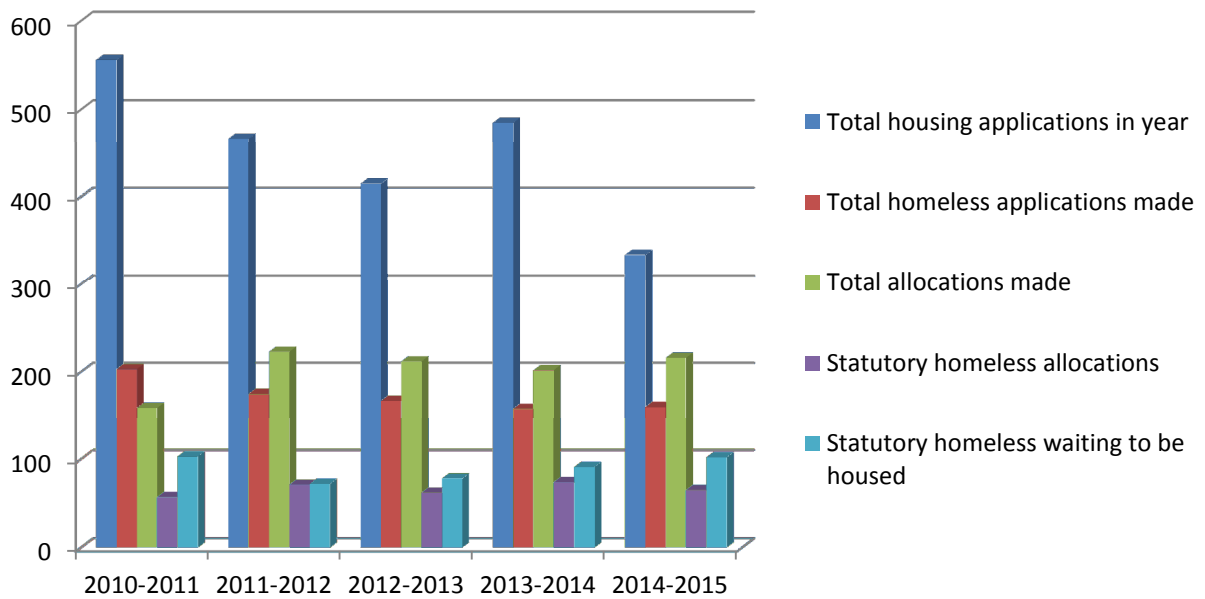
- 8.1 At the date of writing this Report, 102 priority homeless households were waiting on an offer of permanent housing in order for the Comhairle's duty to them to be fully discharged. This is a 10% increase in the numbers waiting compared to the same date in 2014/15. In this period, 65 homeless households were provided with a permanent tenancy under homelessness legislation. This figure represents 30% of all allocations made in the Western Isles, a slight decrease on the 33% of all allocations made in the preceding year. Chart 12 shows the housing outcomes for all cases closed in 2013/14.

**Chart 12 – Known outcomes for homeless households in the Western Isles for cases closed in 2013-2014 and 2014-2015**



- 8.2 Stornoway continues to be the most pressurised area. Of all social housing allocations made in 2014/15 in Stornoway, 49% were to statutory homeless household. HHP aims to allocate 50% of properties in Stornoway to homeless households.
- 8.3 The average length of time taken to make a first offer of permanent housing to priority homeless households was 249 days in 2014/15, a 19% decrease on the time taken in 2013/14. It took an average of 306 days for all priority homeless households to be housed as 14 households waited for a second offer. The decrease in the length of time taken is encouraging but must be balanced against the increase in the overall number of households waiting to be given a permanent 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 2014/15, 15% of first offers were made within 3 months. Achieving this target is likely to become increasingly difficult given the high levels of homelessness against levels of void turnover.
- 8.4 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 13 below illustrates the pressures on waiting lists.

**Chart 13 – Housing and homelessness trends 2010-2015**



## 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 2014/15 there were 41 referrals made to this service, 34 for Lewis and Harris, and 7 for Uist and Barra. A further 18 referrals were made to Dochas (Crossreach) for support for some clients with alcohol and/or drug issues.
- 9.2 Tenancy sustainment levels continue to be high with 100% of homeless applicants housed permanently under homelessness legislation in 2013-2014 sustaining their tenancy for more than one year. (Some tenancies did end but the termination was planned and not considered as a failed tenancy). For all households housed by HHP in 2013-2014, 92% sustained their tenancy for more than one year. It is important to note that not all of those who didn't sustain their tenancy would be classed as failed tenancies as some moved in with a partner, moved away, bought their own house etc.
- 9.3 In order to assist in preventing repeat homelessness for those households provided with permanent accommodation under homelessness legislation, the Comhairle works with local churches to provide starter packs, and recycles second hand furniture provided by the general public, often collecting donations and distributing to new tenants on the same day. In 2014-2015 the Comhairle assisted 13 households by providing second hand furniture, and a further 5 households were provided with a church starter pack. A temporary solution for storage space has now been identified and this should increase the number of households who can be assisted with the provision of second hand furniture, as should the recent launch of the Blythswood Local Recycling 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. Referrals are made to Adult Services, Education and Children's Services, Health, Penumbra, the Foyer and Hebrides Alpha.

**Table 3 – Support needs as identified by household when making homeless application 2014-2015**

<b>Support Need</b>	<b>Number of applicants</b>
Mental health	43
Learning disability	4
Physical disability	10
Medical condition	27
Drug or alcohol dependency	21
Basic housing management/independent living skills	9

- 10.3 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 2014 to 31 March 2015, 452 NHS vouchers were distributed, 194% more than in the preceding year. A further 50 food vouchers were issued for the Trussell Trust Food Bank operated by New Wine Church, a 39% increase on the previous year. Also, as of January 2014, following consultation with Environmental Health, the Comhairle canteen has provided leftover hot food to The Acres residents, Monday to Friday.

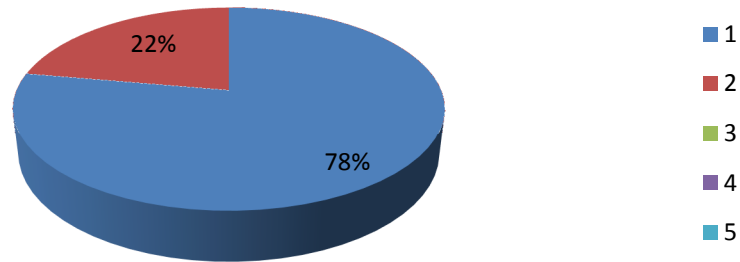
## **REVIEWS AND COMPLAINTS**

- 11.1 There were no appeals against homelessness determinations made to the Comhairle in 2014/15, and no appeals against offers of permanent accommodation.
- 11.2 There were no formal complaints made about the Homelessness Service in 2014/15.

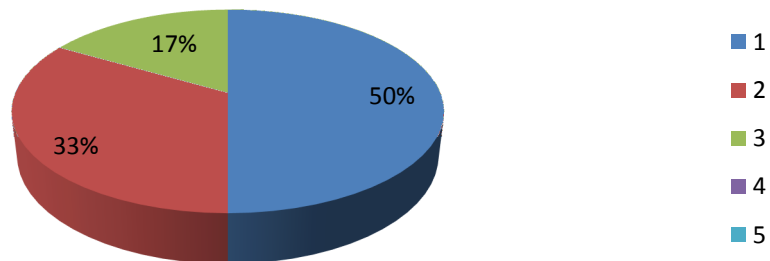
## **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

- 12.1 The Homelessness Service User Questionnaire has 3 stages: initial interview, temporary accommodation and an exit questionnaire. Return rates are fairly low at around 7%. Of all responses, 100% were satisfied or very satisfied with their initial interview, 83% were satisfied or very satisfied with their temporary accommodation and 91% rated the overall service as good, very good or excellent.

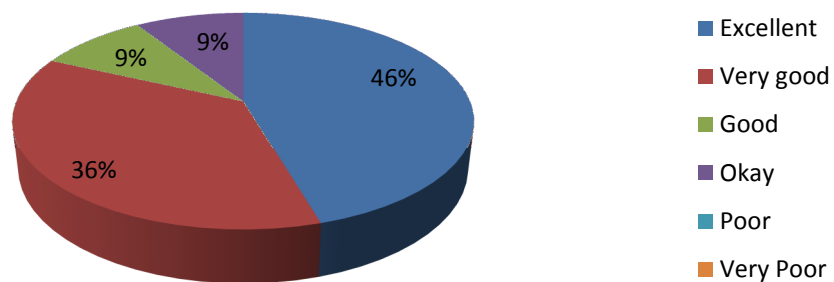
**Chart 14 - Initial Interview satisfaction ratings 2014-2015 (1=very satisfied, 5=very dissatisfied) (9 returns)**



**Chart 15 - Temporary Accommodation satisfaction ratings 2014-2015 (1= very satisfied, 5 = very dissatisfied) (6 returns)**



**Chart 16 - Exit Questionnaire overall satisfaction ratings 2014-2015 (11 returns)**



12.2 The Comhairle has now rationalised all standards and targets into one framework as illustrated in the table below. In 2014-2015 the Comhairle at least met 5 out of the 9 relevant targets.

**Table 4 - Homelessness Performance Management Framework**

Standard	Type	Actual 2012-2013	Actual 2013-2014	Target 2014-2015	Actual 2014-2015
<b>Initial Interview</b>					
Interview applicants within 1 working day (unless applicant specifies otherwise)	CNES <sup>1</sup>	96%	96%	90%	98%
<b>Determinations</b>					
Applicants to be advised of homelessness decision within 28 days of interview	SG <sup>2</sup> /SHRIP <sub>3</sub>	79%	74%	80%	75%
Reduction in number of Lost Contacts	SHRIP	4%	5%	10%	5%
%age of priority need cases reassessed within 12 months of completion of duty	SPI <sup>4</sup>	9%	6%	n/a	0.7%
<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	87%	98%	100%	83%
Breaches of unsuitable accommodation order	SG	1	0	0	0
<b>Permanent Accommodation</b>					
90 days to first offer	CNES	13%	13%	25%	15%
Second offer within 90 days of first offer	CNES	12.5%		90%	30%
%age of priority need households housed	SPI	64%	68%	n/a	51%
Tenancy Sustainment for over 12 months	CNES	100%	97%	100%	100%
<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%	-

## SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

13.1 Review and proposals for future use of The Old House and The Acres are being progressed.

<sup>1</sup> Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Housing Regulator Improvement Plan

<sup>4</sup> Statutory Performance Indicator

## **CONCLUSION**

- 14.1 Homeless applications made to the Comhairle have increased slightly. Although homelessness decreased by 4% throughout Scotland in 2014-2015, 13 local authorities experienced an increase in homelessness.
- 14.2 The backlog of homeless households awaiting an offer of permanent accommodation has increased, probably as a direct result of the phasing out of priority need. The length of time for homeless households to be provided with permanent accommodation has decreased which is encouraging but must be balanced against the increase in households waiting for an offer of permanent accommodation.
- 14.3 Bed and Breakfast usage has decreased significantly since The Acres became operational. The Comhairle aims to further reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast by increasing its existing stock of temporary accommodation, and will continue to seek to identify the most viable options for achieving this.
- 14.3 There is a decrease in the number of applicants presenting as a result of rent arrears or mortgage default, and less applicants are stating that financial difficulties, debt or unemployment contributed to their homelessness, however, there has been a significant increase in the amount of NHS food vouchers being issued and in the number of vouchers being issued for the Food Bank.
- 14.4 The increase in applicants with mental health issues is compounding the existing pressures on the Homelessness Service.
- 14.5 Overall satisfaction rates with the Service continue to be high as does tenancy sustainment.
- 14.5 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.