

ENVIRONMENT AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES COMMITTEE: 7 JUNE 2016

HOUSING OPTIONS AND HOMELESSNESS ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

Report by Director of Development

PURPOSE OF REPORT To provide the Comhairle with an update of housing options and homelessness issues covering the year 2015/16.

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 2015 – 31 March 2016, a total of 155 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 12 households were assisted under the housing options approach. Of these 12, 4 households went on to make a homeless presentation.
- 2.2 Of all homeless applications made to the Comhairle in 2015-2016, 113 were made to Lewis (5 of which were from Harris), 35 to Uist and 7 to Barra.
- 2.3 The Comhairle accepted a duty to permanently accommodate 109 households in this period and discharged its duty to 69 households by providing them with permanent accommodation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

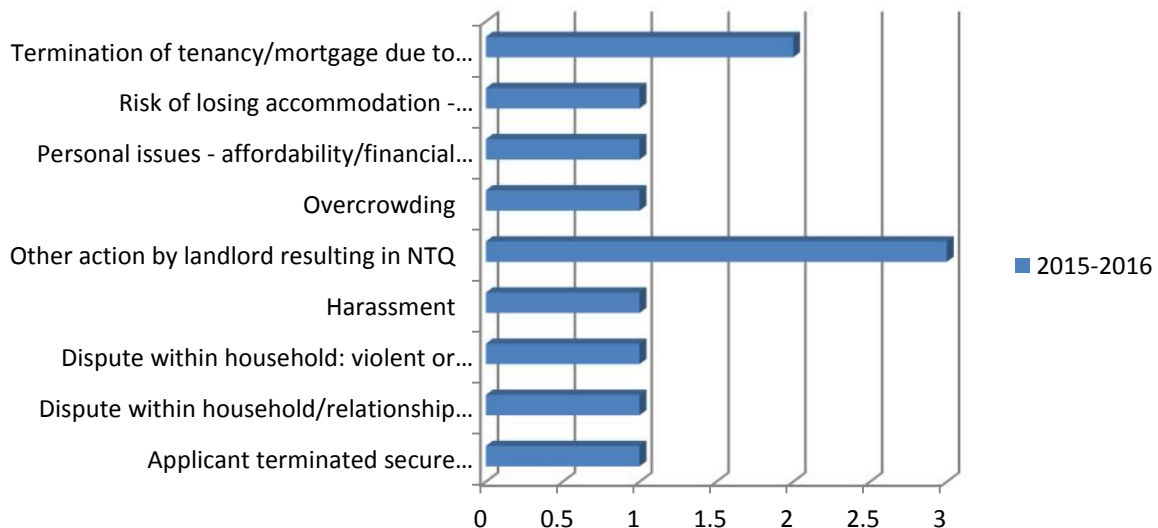
- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle:**
 - a) **note the contents of this Report; and**
 - b) **authorise the Director of Development to enter into discussions with Hebridean Housing Partnership with a view to developing the existing target system for homeless allocations and in particular to establish targets for allocations in Uist and Barra.**

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

HOUSING OPTIONS APPLICATIONS AND OUTCOMES

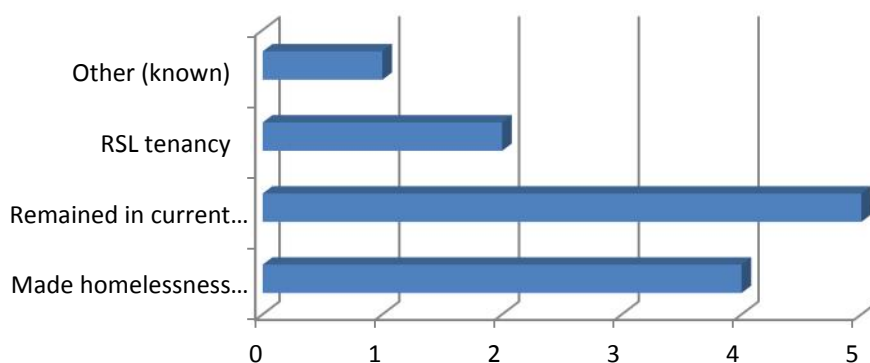
- 4.1 Any applicant threatened with homelessness presenting to the Service is offered a housing options interview in the first instance in order to attempt to prevent homelessness from happening. The Comhairle has a duty to advise all applicants of their right to a homelessness interview if that is their preferred option. During the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016, 12 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 2015-2016



- 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 Twelve Housing Options applications were closed during 2015-2016. Five of these remained in their current accommodation and 4 went on to make a homelessness application to the Comhairle.

Chart 2- Housing Options Outcomes in the Western Isles 2015-2016



HOMELESS APPLICATIONS

5.1 During the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016, 155 homelessness applications were made to the Comhairle consisting of 176 adults and 51 children. This is a 3% decrease on last year's figure of 160.

Chart 3 - Homeless and Housing Options Applications in the Western Isles 2006-2016

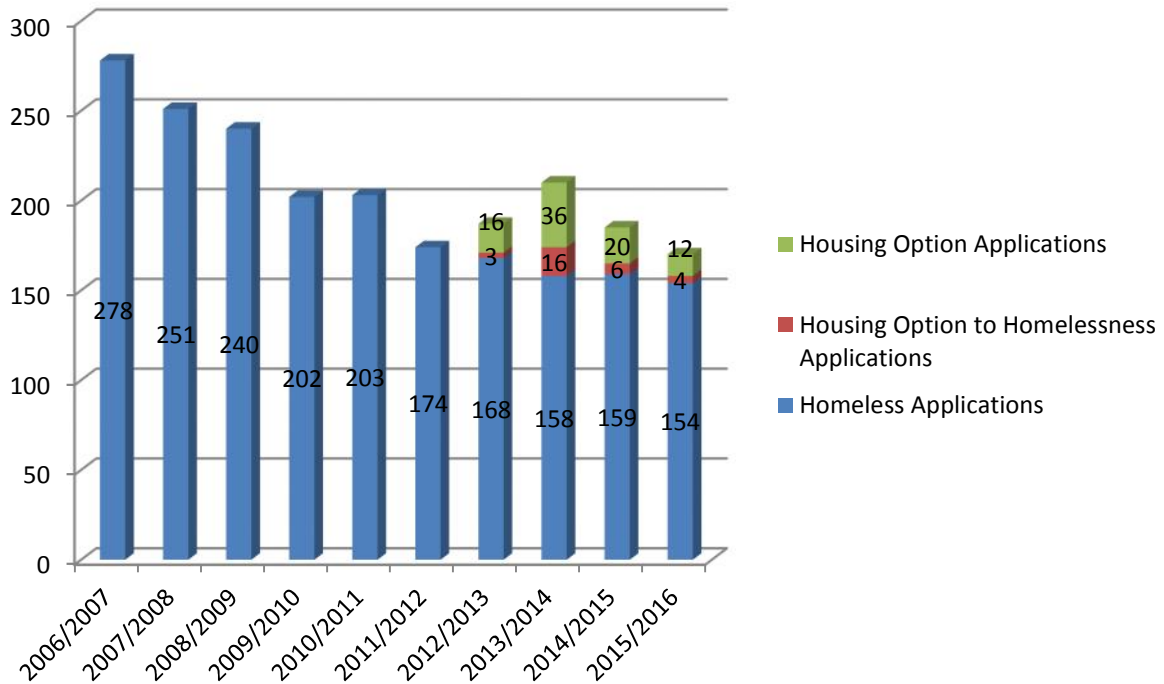
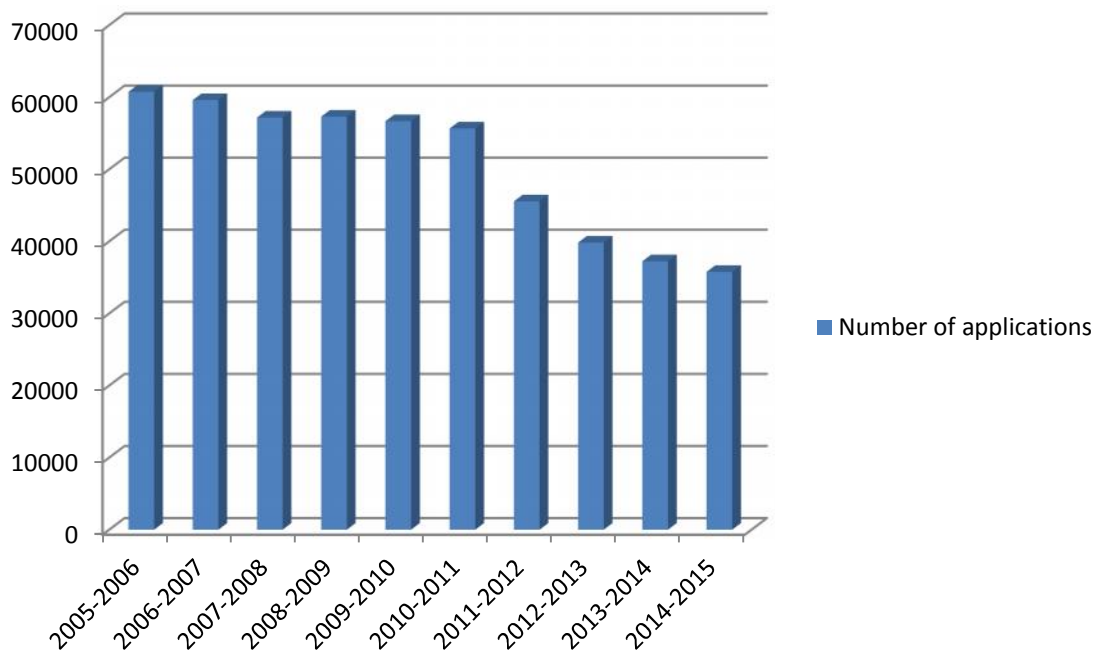


Chart 4 - Homeless Applications in Scotland 2005-2015



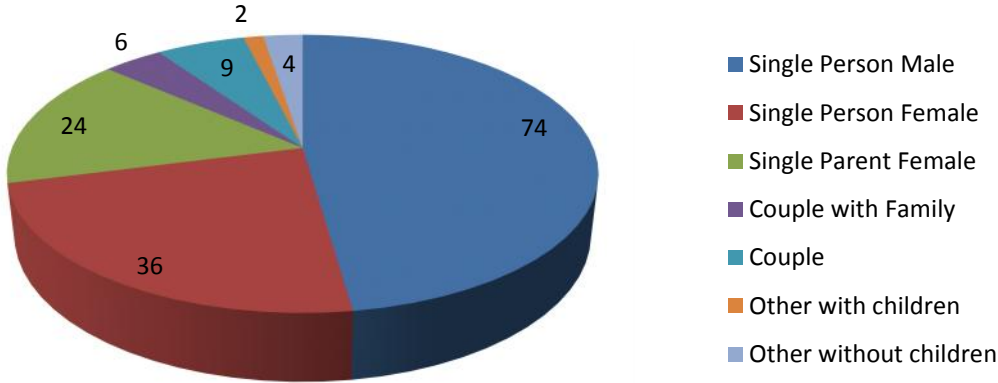
5.2 The majority of presentations continue to be made to Stornoway. Proportions presenting have remained fairly consistent across the area offices other than an increase for Barra. Over this period 70% of presentations were from Lewis, 3% from Harris, 22.5% from Uist and 4.5% from Barra. This is representative of the total number of households in each area as shown below.

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	108	5	35	7
Proportion of homeless applicants to all homeless households	70%	3%	22.5%	4.5%
Proportion of homeless households to all households by area	1.2%	0.5%	1.6%	1.2%

5.3 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.

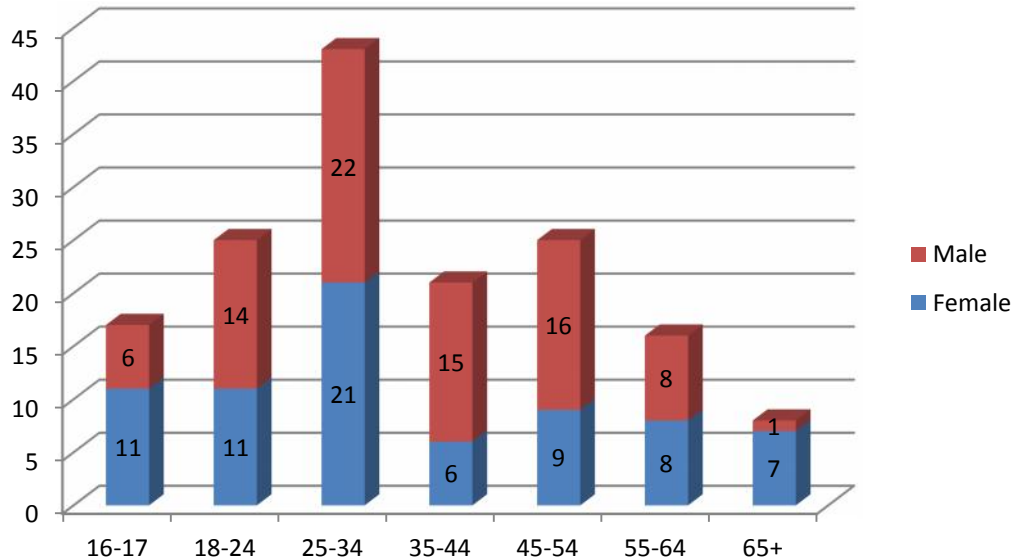
Chart 5 – Homeless Applications in the Western Isles in 2015-2016 by Household Type



¹ Data from 2011 Western Isles Census

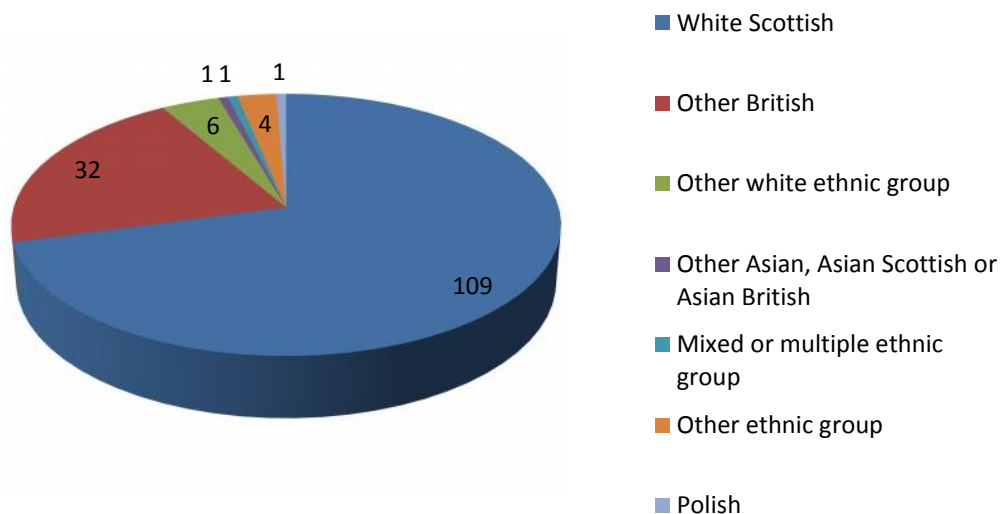
5.4 Applications can be broken down further into age ranges for the main applicant as shown below.

Chart 6 – Homeless Age Groups by Gender 2015-2016



5.5 The ethnic origin of homeless applicants in the Western Isles for 2015 to 2016 is shown at Chart 7 below. One applicant described themselves as a gypsy/traveller. A further 19 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.

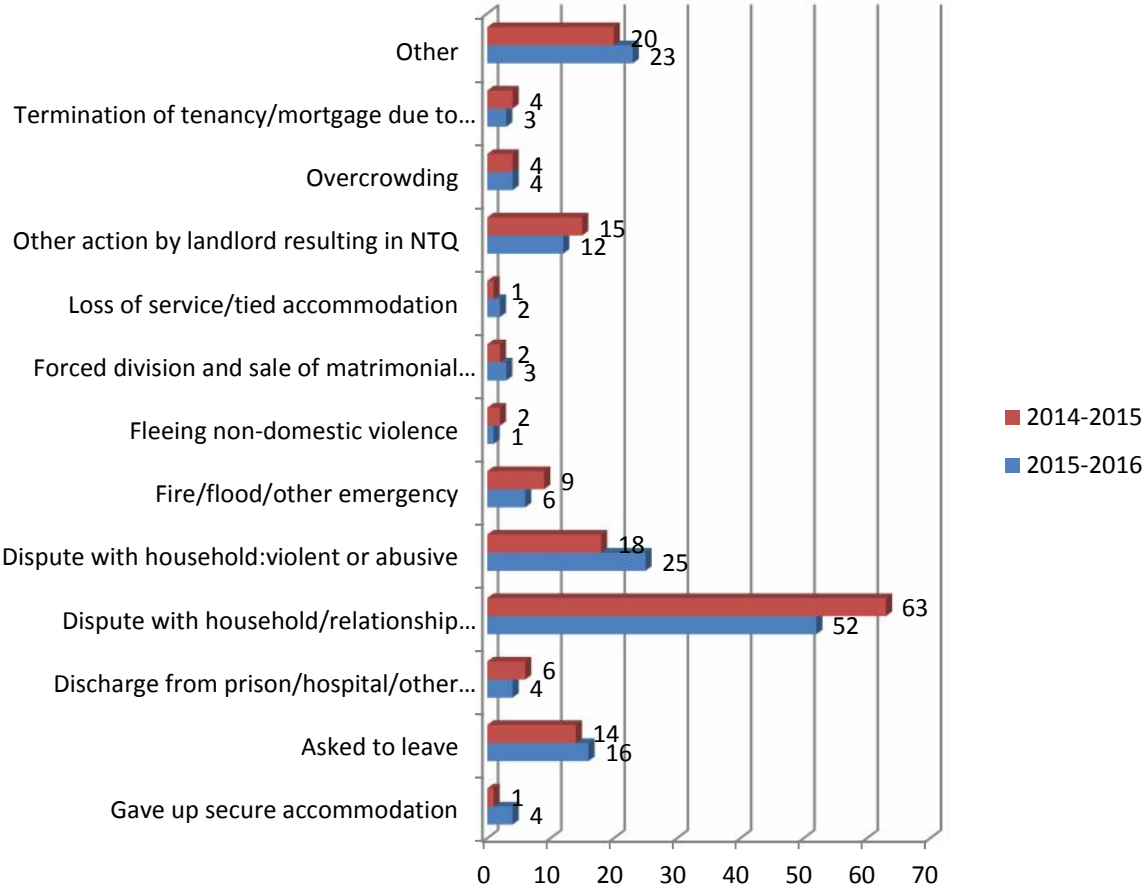
Chart 7 – Homeless Applications in the Western Isles by Ethnic Origin 2015-2016



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

- 5.7 Three applicants had previously been a member of the armed services with two having served less than 5 years ago.
- 5.8 A further 11 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.
- 5.9 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 2015-2016. Of those who presented for this reason, 32% stated that there was abuse in the relationship. Numbers of those disclosing domestic abuse rose from 18 households in 2014-2015 to 25 in 2015-2016. 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.

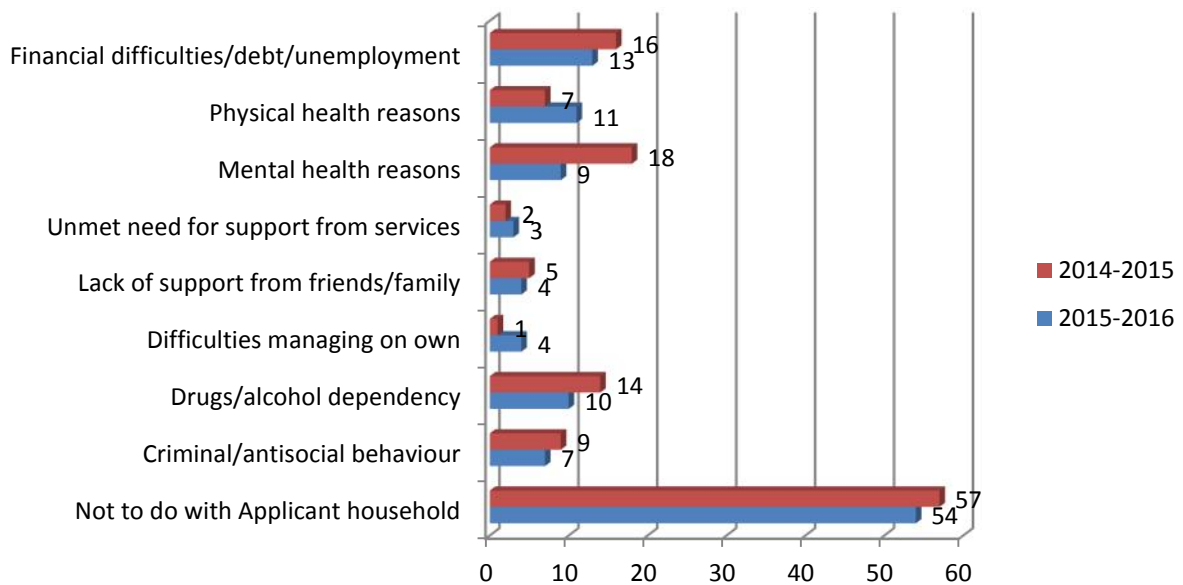
Chart 8 - Technical Reasons for Homelessness in the Western Isles 2014-2015 and 2015-2016



- 5.10 Underlying reasons for failing to maintain the household's existing accommodation are also investigated. 10% of households stating that financial difficulties, debt or unemployment was a contributing factor to their homelessness, the same percentage as last year. This was the main contributory factor given. The actual number of households presenting as a result of rent arrears or decreased slightly from 2.5% to 2%.

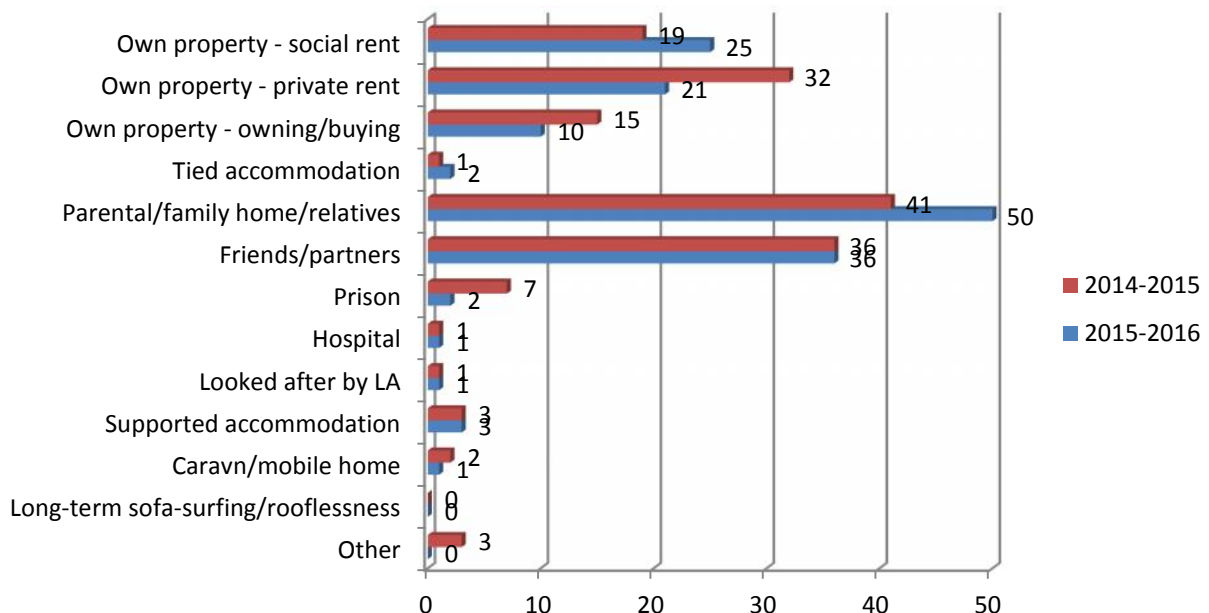
5.11 Only 9 applicants identified mental health as a contributory factor to their homelessness, 50% less than for 2014-2015. However, 40 households stated that they required support because of their mental health as shown in Table 3 on page 11 of this report. This is a 7% decrease on the previous year's figure. A further 14 applicants stated that they required support due to a learning disability, 71% more than for the preceding year. This illustrates the continuing pressures on the Service both for staff and resources as a result of mental health issues and learning difficulties.

Chart 9 – Underlying reasons for failing to maintain accommodation in the Western Isles 2014-2015 and 2015-2016



5.12 Of the 155 households who applied in 2015-2016, 86 (55%) had been living with friends and relatives while 56 (36%) had been living in their own property (i.e. which they either rented or owned).

Chart 10 – Prior housing circumstances of applicants in the Western Isles 2014-2015 and 2015-2016



HOMELESS ASSESSMENTS

- 6.1 In the year 2015-2016, 25 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 2 households and one household was ineligible for assistance. Of the remaining 121 households assessed as homeless or potentially homeless, 116 were assessed as unintentionally homeless. A further 5 were found to be intentionally homeless.

Table 2 – Assessments of homeless applications 2013-2016

	2013-2014		2014-2015		2015-2016	
	CNES	Scotland	CNES	Scotland	CNES	Scotland
Unintentionally homeless	68%	76%	76%	77%	75%	Not yet available
Intentionally homeless	7.5%	5%	5%	5%	3%	
Assessed as not homeless	0.7%	5%	0.6%	4%	3%	
Lost contact, withdrew etc.	23%	14%	17.5%	13%	17.5%	
All assessments	147	37,169	166	35,886	154	

- 6.2 In the period 2015-2016, 7 households were assessed as unintentionally homeless with no local connection. Five of these were provided with temporary accommodation.

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

- 7.1 There are presently 71 operational homeless temporary accommodation units throughout the Western Isles. The Comhairle provides 37 of these from its own stock, leases a further 32 properties from HHP, and leases two properties in Barra from the private sector.
- 7.2 As a result of The Acres now having been fully operational for the whole of 2015-2016 Bed and Breakfast usage has reduced significantly. At the date of writing this Report the Comhairle was providing only 4 households with Bed and Breakfast accommodation (1 of these in Uist).
- 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. The Comhairle has recently acquired 2 properties from the private market and a Comhairle education property has been transferred to the Homelessness Service for use as temporary accommodation.
- 7.4 In 2015/16, the Comhairle accommodated 13 homeless households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation with an average length of stay of 11 weeks, a decrease of 61% on the length of stay for 2014/15. Lengths of stay in all temporary accommodation is now recorded not just for cases which have been closed in the year but also for those who have been moved to alternative temporary accommodation in the year, resulting in an increase in the overall figures and a decrease in the lengths of stay as shown at Charts 12 and 13 below.

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 110 homeless households as having been provided with furnished temporary accommodation, 46 of these in The Acres. Again it should be noted that this figure reflects households whose cases have been closed or who have been moved in the year. The average length of stay in this case was 20 weeks for LA furnished accommodation and 10 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.

Chart 12 – Numbers of cases closed in the year provided with temporary accommodation in the Western Isles 2010-2016

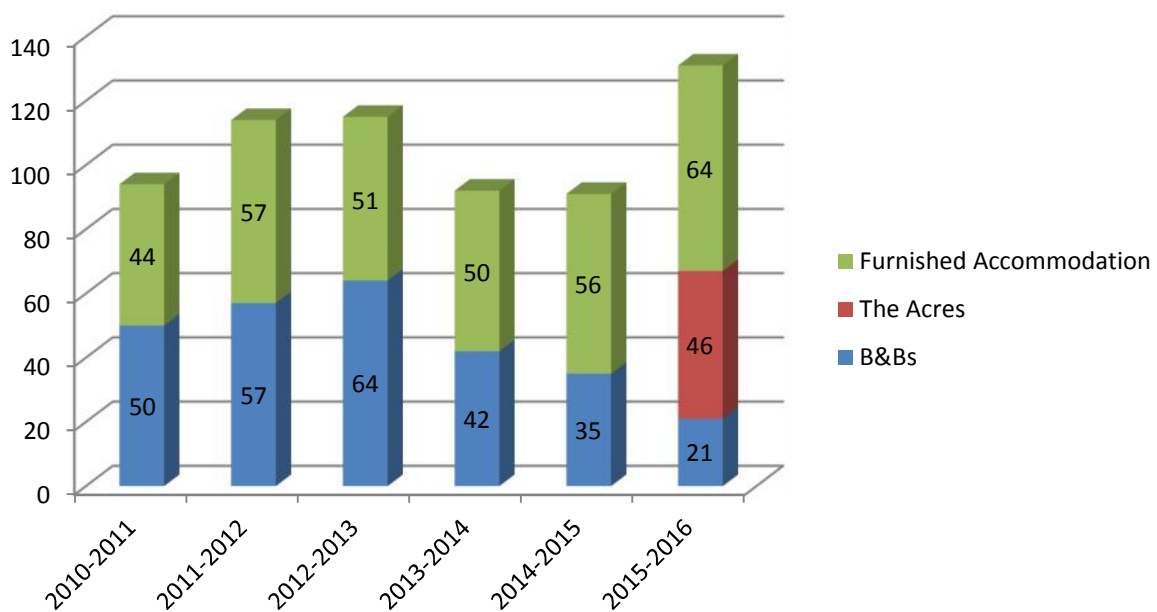


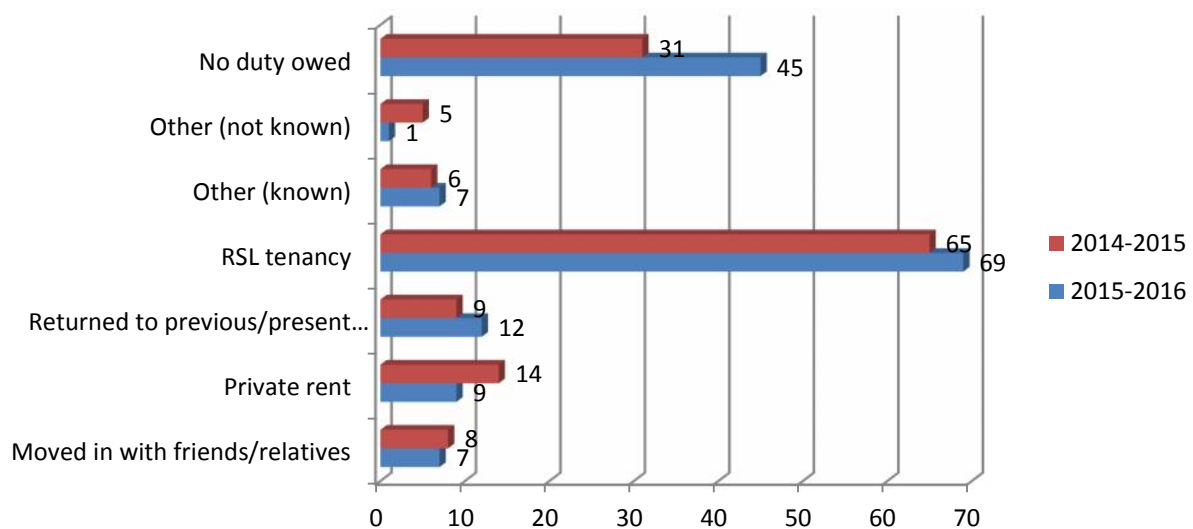
Chart 13 – Lengths of stay in temporary accommodation in the Western Isles for closed cases 2006-2016 (weeks)



PERMANENT ACCOMMODATION

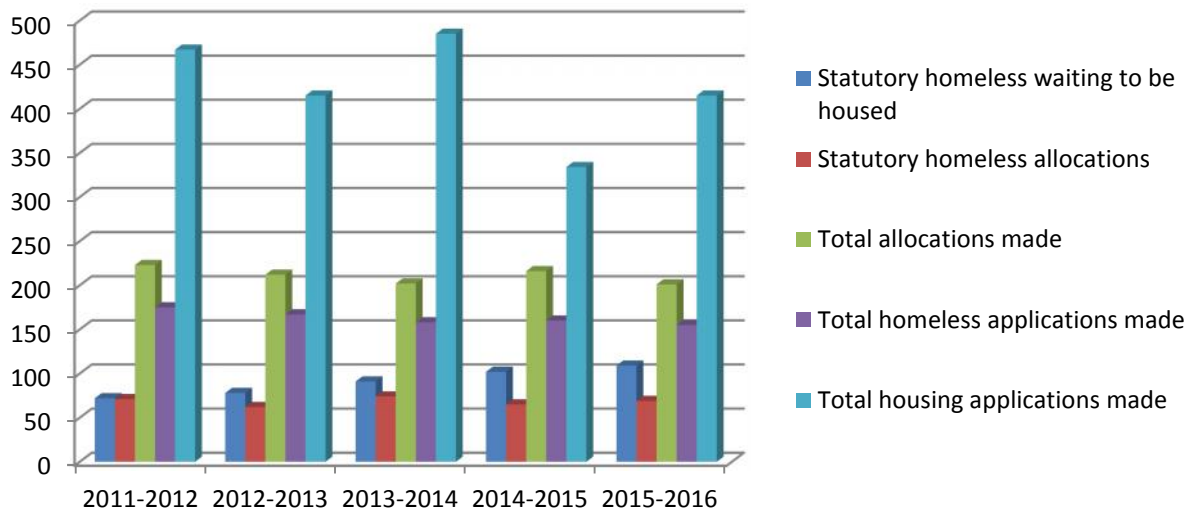
- 8.1 At the date of writing this Report, 109 priority homeless households were waiting an offer of permanent housing in order for the Comhairle's duty to them to be fully discharged. This is a 7% increase in the numbers waiting compared to the same date in 2015/16, and is the highest ever recorded. In this period, 69 homeless households were provided with a permanent tenancy under homelessness legislation. This figure represents 33% of all allocations made in the Western Isles, a slight increase on the 30% of all allocations made in the preceding year. Chart 14 shows the housing outcomes for all cases closed in 2015/16.

Chart 14 – Known outcomes for homeless households in the Western Isles for cases closed in 2014-2015 and 2015-2016



- 8.2 Stornoway continues to be the most pressurised area. Of all social housing allocations made in 2015/16 in Stornoway, 44% 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 276 days in 2015/16, an 11% increase on the time taken in 2014/15. It took an average of 288 days, a 6% decrease on the preceding year, for all priority homeless households to be housed as 6 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 2015/16, 22% of first offers were made within 3 months. Achieving this target is likely to continue to prove 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. It is proposed that the Comhairle enters into discussions with Hebridean Housing Partnership as part of the annual review of the Service Level Agreement between both organisations, with a view to setting a target for allocations to be made in Uist and Barra. Chart 15 below illustrates the pressures on waiting lists.

Chart 15 – Housing and homelessness trends 2011-2016



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 2015/16 there were 40 new referrals made to this service. A further 6 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 95% of homeless applicants housed permanently under homelessness legislation in 2014-2015 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 2014-2015, 81% 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 2015-2016 the Comhairle assisted 18 households by providing second hand furniture, and a further 4 households were provided with a church starter pack. Temporary solutions for storage space have continued to be identified which increases the number of households who can be assisted with the provision of second hand furniture.
- 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

Support Need	Number of applicants
Mental health	40
Learning disability	15
Physical disability	19
Medical condition	34
Drug or alcohol dependency	24
Basic housing management/independent living skills	14

- 10.3 The Homelessness Service has worked closely with Education and Children's Services to transfer the staffing and day to day operation of The Old House between departments. The Homelessness Service have retained ownership and landlord responsibilities while Education and Children's Services will provide support to the young people accommodated 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 has also supported the multi-agency Syrian Refugee Families Resettlement Planning Group by offering 0.5 FTE of a Homeless Support Officer to assist in the co-ordination of accommodation, services and ongoing support for the families prior to, during and after resettlement.
- 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 2015 to 31 March 2016, 18 NHS vouchers were distributed. A further 121 food vouchers were issued for the Trussell Trust Food Bank operated by New Wine Church, a 142% increase on the previous year but this figure includes 62 Christmas food parcels. Martin's Memorial Church also provided 10 food parcels. The Comhairle canteen continues to provide leftover hot food to The Acres residents, Monday to Friday.

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 were no appeals against homelessness determinations made to the Comhairle in 2015/16, and no appeals against offers of permanent accommodation.
- 12.2 There were no formal complaints made about the Homelessness Service in 2015/16.

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 around 8%. Of all responses, 100% were satisfied or very satisfied with their initial interview, 82% were satisfied or very satisfied with their temporary accommodation and 83% rated the overall service as very good or excellent.

Chart 16 - Initial Interview satisfaction ratings 2015-2016 (17 returns)

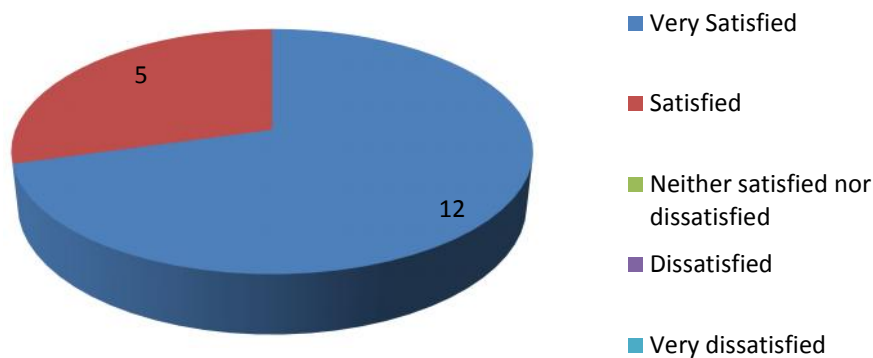


Chart 17-Temporary Accommodation satisfaction ratings 2015-2016 (11 returns)

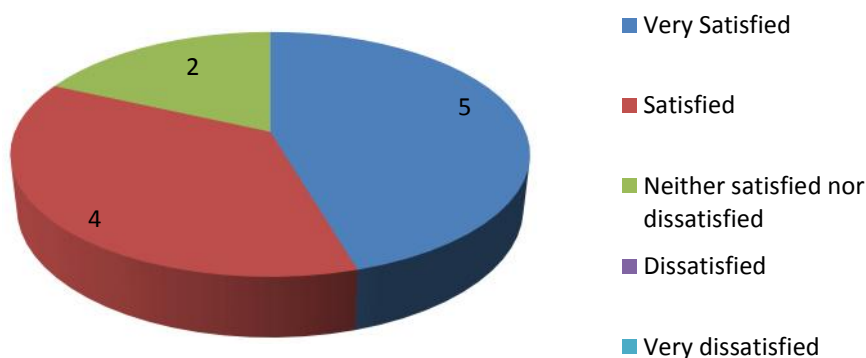
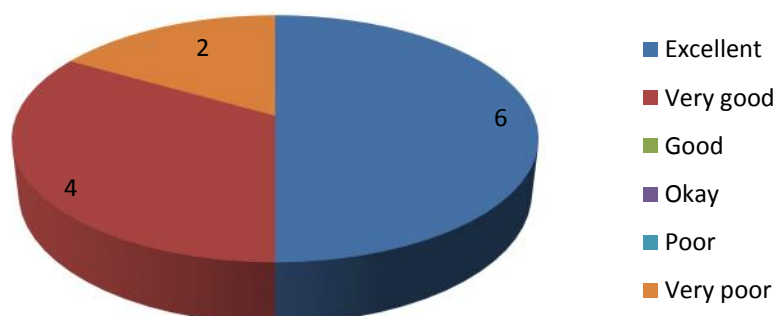


Chart 18 - Exit Questionnaire overall satisfaction ratings 2015-2016 (12 returns)



13.2 The Comhairle's homelessness standards and targets are illustrated in the table below. In 2015-2016 the Comhairle at least met 6 out of the 9 relevant targets.

Table 4 - Homelessness Performance Management Framework

Standard	Type	Actual 2013-2014	Actual 2014-2015	Target 2015-2016	Actual 2015-2016
Initial Interview					
Interview applicants within 1 working day (unless applicant specifies otherwise)	CNES ²	96%	98%	90%	98%
Determinations					
Applicants to be advised of homelessness decision within 28 days of interview	SG ³ /SHRIP ⁴	74%	75%	80%	87%
Reduction in number of Lost Contacts	SHRIP	5%	5%	10%	1%
%age of priority need cases reassessed within 12 months of completion of duty	SPI ⁵	6%	0.7%	n/a	2%
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	98%	83%	100%	100%
Breaches of unsuitable accommodation order	SG	0	0	0	0
Permanent Accommodation					
90 days to first offer	CNES	13%	15%	25%	22%
Second offer within 90 days of first offer	CNES		30%	90%	40%
%age of priority need households housed	SPI	68%	51%	n/a	64%
Tenancy Sustainment for over 12 months	CNES	97%	100%	100%	95%
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

CONCLUSION

- 14.1 Homeless applications made to the Comhairle have decreased slightly. National figures hadn't been released at the date of writing this report.
- 14.2 The backlog of homeless households awaiting an offer of permanent accommodation has continued to increase and is now at the highest recorded figure as a direct result of the phasing out of priority need. The overall 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 As a direct consequence of The Acres being fully operational Bed and Breakfast usage has continued to decrease as has the average length of stay in Bed and Breakfast.
- 14.4 The ongoing high levels of applicants with mental health issues and the increase in those with learning disabilities are compounding the existing pressures on the Homelessness Service.
- 14.5 Overall satisfaction rates with the Service continue to be high.
- 14.6 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.