



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

19 SEPTEMBER 2023

HOUSING OPTIONS AND HOMELESSNESS ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

Report by Depute Chief Executive

PURPOSE OF REPORT To provide the Comhairle with an update of housing options and homelessness issues covering the year 2022/23.

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 2022 – 31 March 2023, 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 five households were assisted under the housing options approach. Of these five, three households went on to make a homeless presentation.
- 2.2 Of all homeless applications made to the Comhairle in 2022-2023, 122 were made to the Stornoway office (7 of which were from Harris), with a further 13 applications from Uist and one from Barra.
- 2.3 The Comhairle accepted a duty to permanently accommodate 112 households in this period and discharged its duty to 75 households by providing them with permanent accommodation.

RECOMMENDATION

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

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Appendix: Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan 2019/20-2023/24 (Revised August 2023)

Background Papers:

IMPLICATIONS

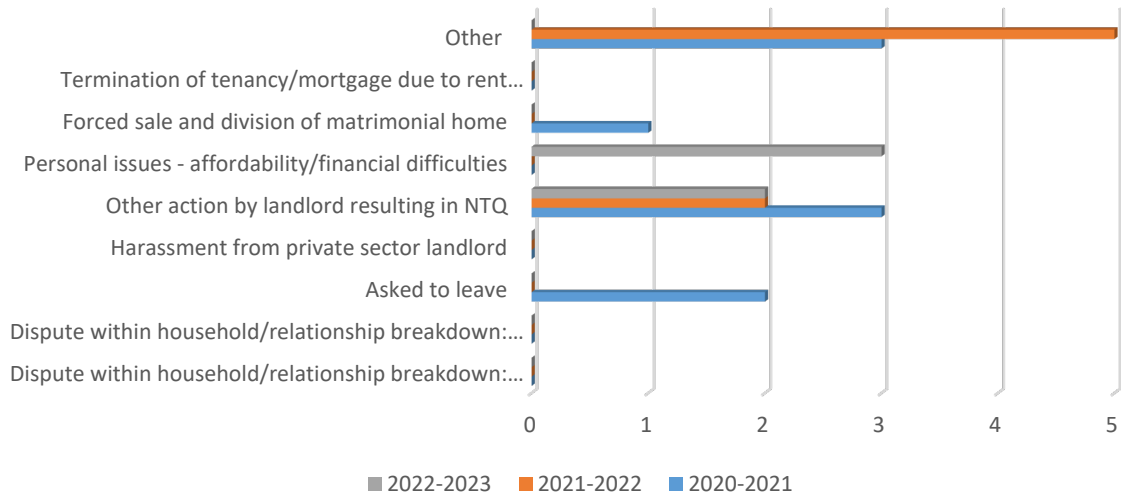
4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	The Comhairle has received £211,000 of funding from the Scottish Government since 2018/19 to assist with implementing a Rapid Rehousing approach to homelessness.
Legal	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.
Staffing	None
Assets and Property	None
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	There are financial and regulatory risks associated with changes to homelessness policy and practice which require to be managed during implementation.
Equalities	If rapid rehousing progresses and a higher number of allocations are made to homeless households then a lower proportion will be made to others in housing need. A full Equality Impact Assessment was completed in October 2019.
Corporate Strategy	Links to the Local Housing Strategy and Strategic Housing Investment Plan.
Environmental Impact	None
Consultation	None

HOUSING OPTIONS APPLICATIONS AND OUTCOMES

- 5.1 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 2022 to 31 March 2023, five housing options applications were made. Housing Options applications continue to be low, possibly due to the lack of options available locally and the generally held perception that a social tenancy is preferable to a private tenancy.
- 5.2 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 reasons given were the landlord serving notice for reasons other than rent arrears or antisocial behaviour, and other reasons for the loss of accommodation.

Chart 1 – Reasons given for Housing Options Applications in the Western Isles 2020/21-2022/23



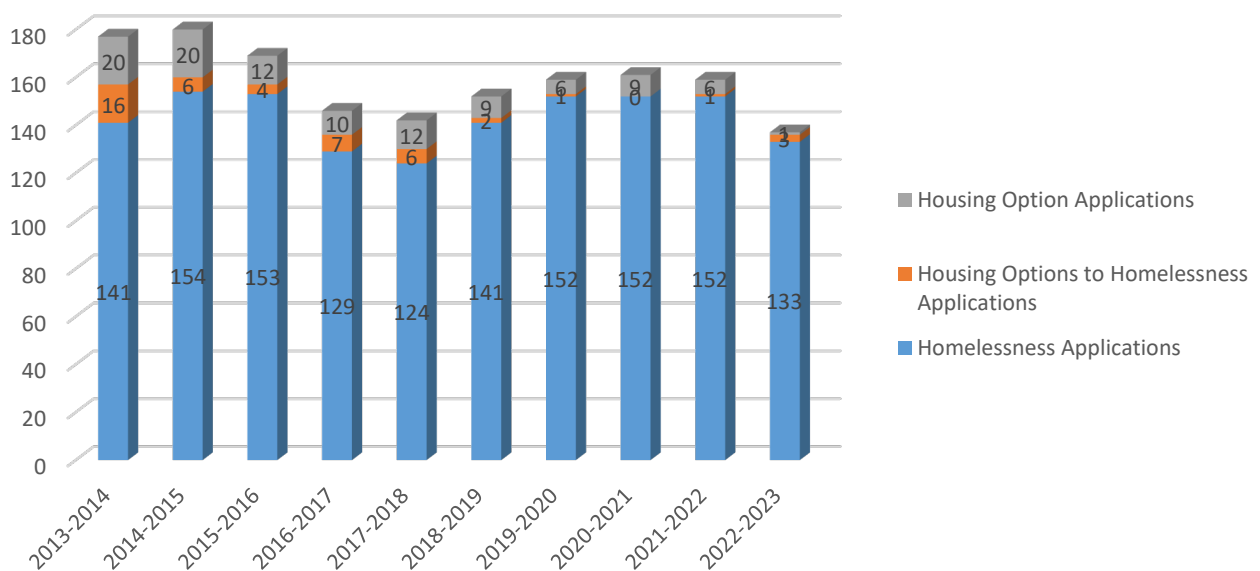
5.3 Housing Options applicants are provided with advice and assistance to try and assist them to remain in their present accommodation, if safe to do so, or find alternative accommodation before the applicant actually becomes homeless. This may include general housing advice, the provision of aids and adaptations, benefit maximisation, and financial advice.

5.4 Four Housing Options applications were closed during 2022-2023. One resolved their housing issues and remained in their accommodation while three applicants went on to make a homelessness application to the Comhairle.

HOMELESSNESS APPLICATIONS

6.1 During the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, 136 homelessness applications were made to the Comhairle consisting of 160 adults and 49 children. This is an 11% decrease on last year’s figure of 153. The number of households presenting in Scotland as a whole increased by 9% last year to 39,006. Twenty-six local authorities reported an increase in homeless households compared to 2021/22.

Chart 2 – Homeless and Housing Options Applications in the Outer Hebrides 2013/14-2022/23



6.2 The majority of homelessness applications are made to the Stornoway Office which covers Lewis and Harris. Over this period 84.6% of presentations were from Lewis, 5.1% from Harris, 9.6% from Uist and 0.7% from Barra.

6.3 Numbers fell across all island groups but especially in Barra.

Chart 3 – Homeless Presentations by Area 2013/14-2022/23

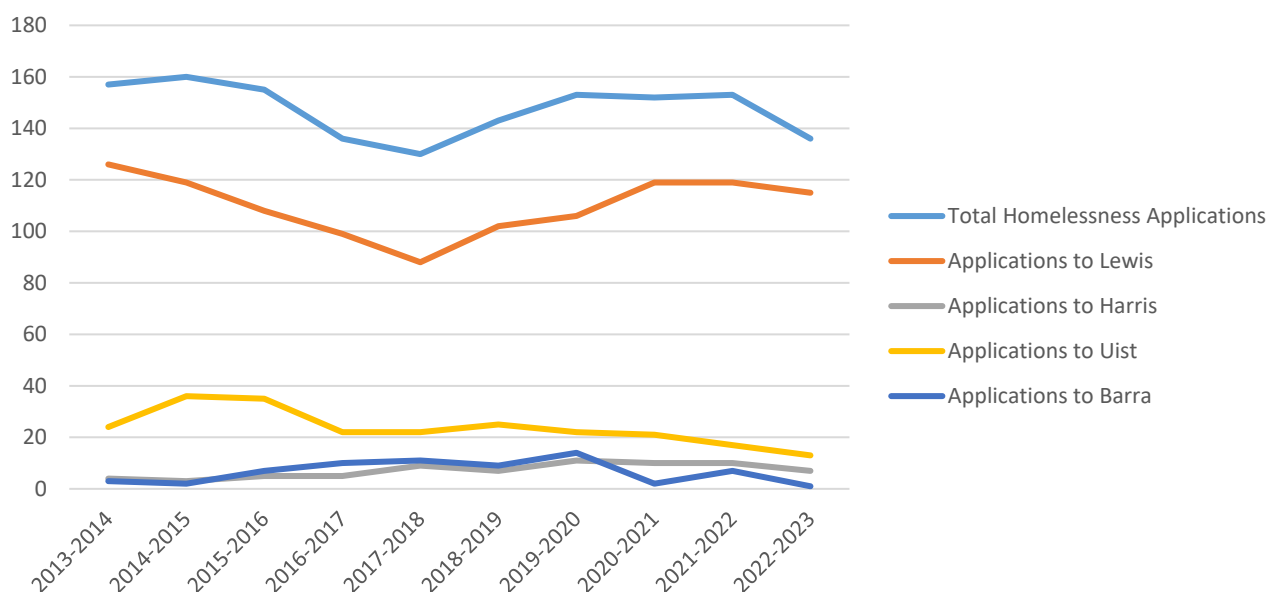


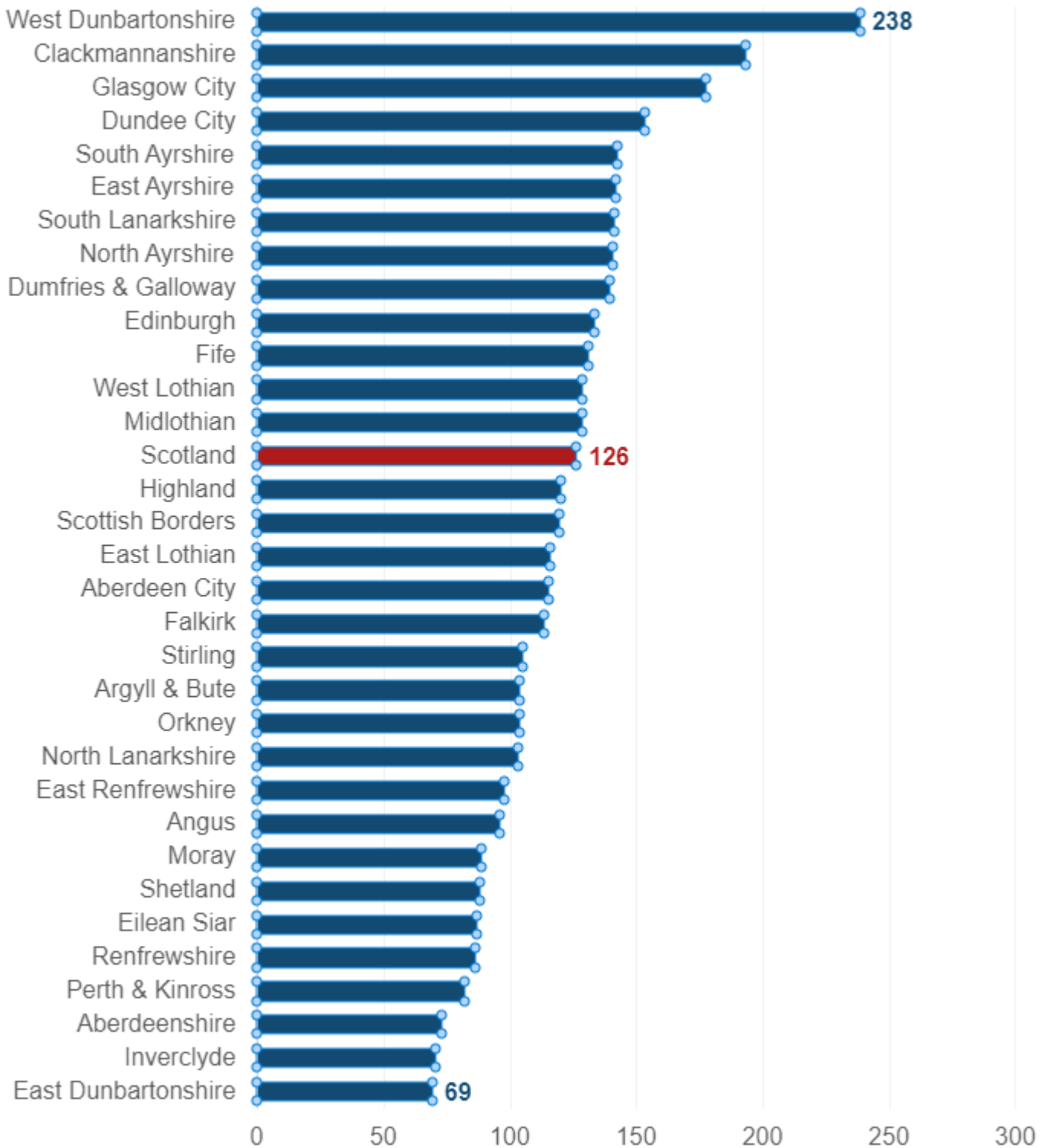
Table 1 – Proportion of homeless presentations to total households in the Outer Hebrides by area 2022/23

	Lewis	Harris	Uist	Barra
Total number of households by area ¹	8,846	911	2,232	587
Total number of households presenting as homeless	115	10	17	7
Proportion of homeless applicants to all homeless households	84.6	5.1%	9.6%	0.7%
Proportion of homeless households to all households by area	1.3%	1.1%	0.76%	1.2%

¹ Data from 2011 Western Isles Census

6.4 The Comhairle had the third lowest overall figure for homelessness in Scotland with Shetland and Orkney having lower respective figures. The rate per 100,000 of the population demonstrates that only five local authorities had less homeless households proportionately than the Comhairle in 2022/23.

Chart 4 – Households assessed as homeless compared to population by local authority 2022/23²

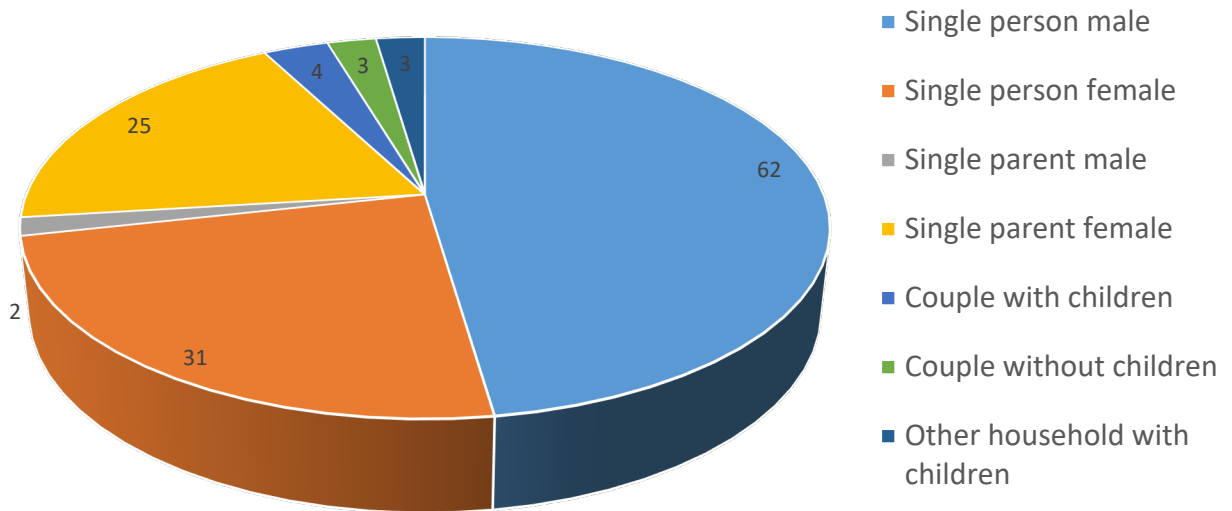


² Data from Scottish Government Homelessness in Scotland Statistics: 2022/23

6.5 4.4% of all applications to the Comhairle were classed as repeat presentations. A household is classed as a repeat presentation if they apply within 12 months of a previous application being closed. Across Scotland as a whole, 4% were repeat presentations.

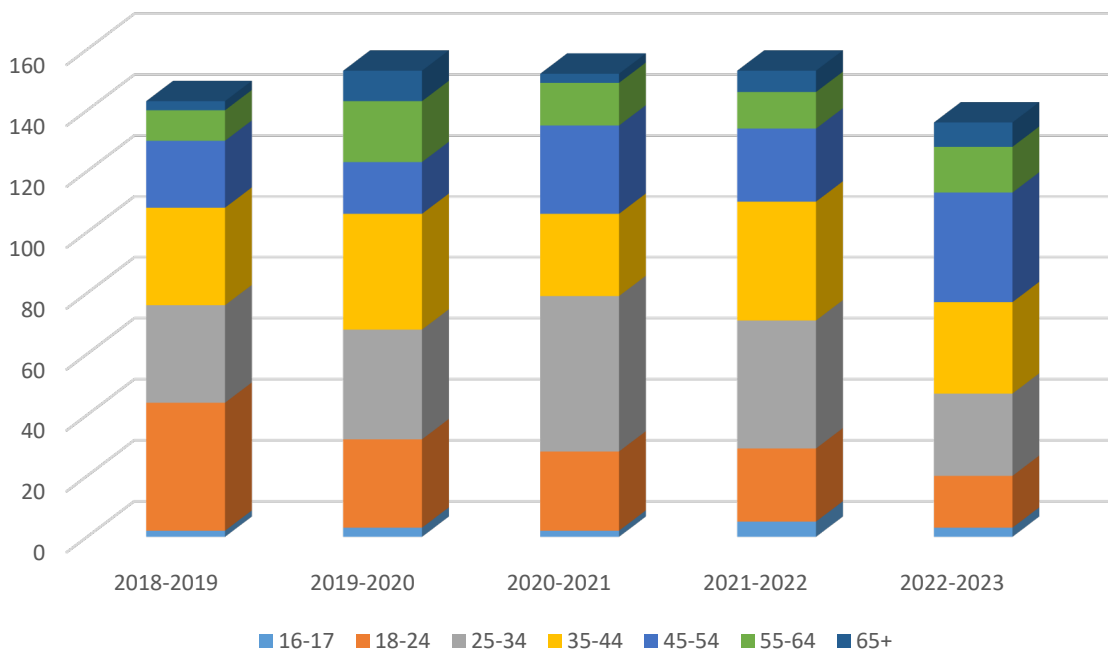
6.6 Household types presenting in the Outer Hebrides generally remain consistent proportionately locally. The main household type presenting continues to be single people with 46% of applications being made by single men and 23% by single women.

Chart 5 – Homeless Applications in the Outer Hebrides in 2022-2023 by Household Type



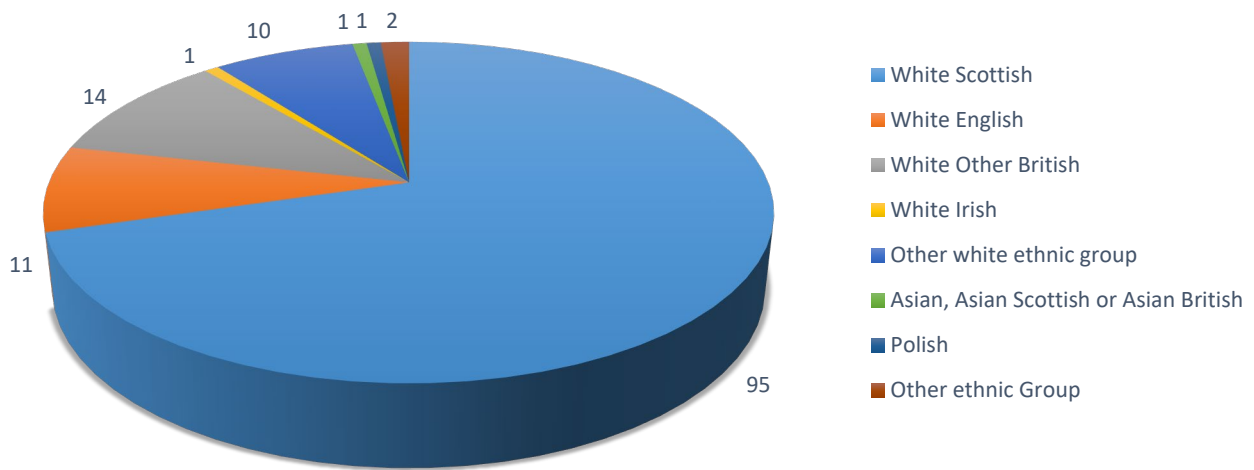
6.6 Applications can be broken down further into age ranges over the past five years for the main applicant as shown at Chart 6 below. The overall numbers of young people (aged 16-24) presenting has decreased and is the lowest number presenting in the past five years. Three aged 16-17 presented in 2022-2023.

Chart 6 – Homeless Age Groups 2018/19-2022/23



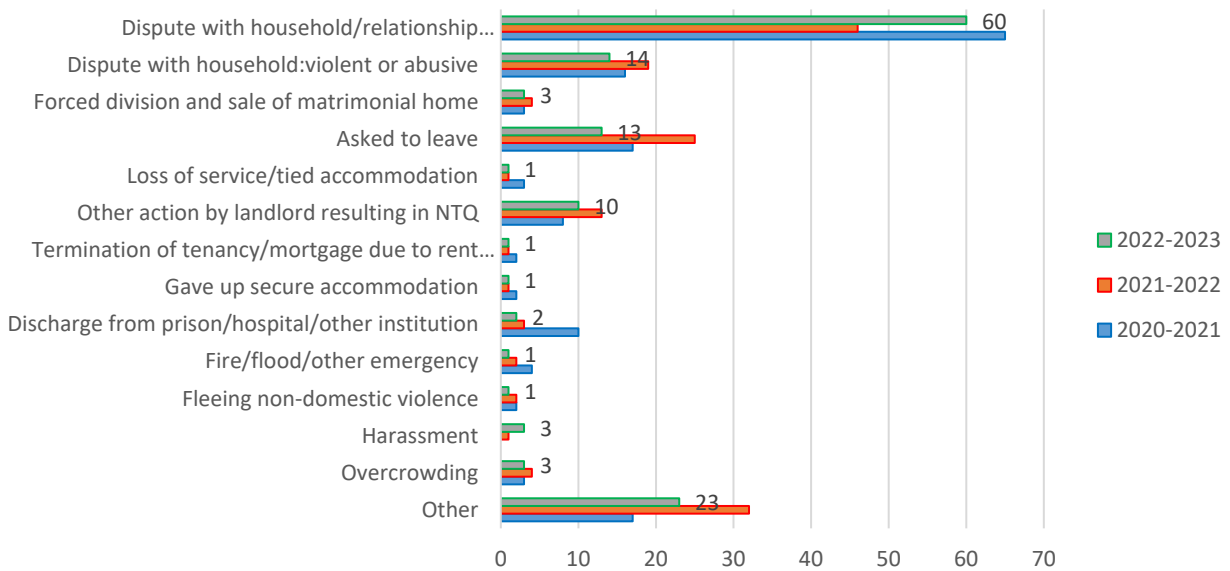
- 6.7 The Comhairle also records the number of care leavers presenting as homeless. In the year 2021-2022, two young people had been formerly looked after by the Comhairle in the past five years. A further four young people aged under 25 had been formerly looked after five or more years ago.
- 6.8 The ethnic origin of homeless applicants in the Outer Hebrides for 2022 to 2023 is shown at Chart 7 below. No applicants described themselves as a gypsy/traveller. Seven applicants stated that they had a physical disability. It continues to be 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 Outer Hebrides by Ethnic Origin 2022 - 2023



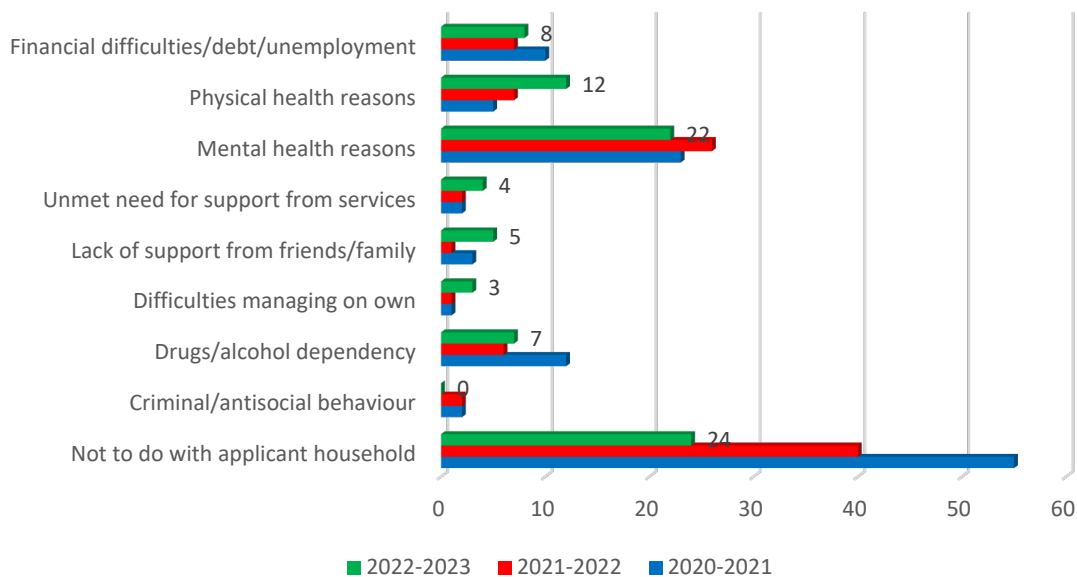
- 6.9 Six applicants stated that they had previously been a member of the armed services, with two having served less than five years ago.
- 6.10 Sixteen applicants stated that they had slept rough in the three months prior to making a homeless application, with five of these saying that they had slept rough on the preceding night. The Outer Hebrides has no long-term rough sleepers. Almost all instances of rough sleeping involve sleeping in a car or outhouse, or walking around waiting for the Office to open the next day. There were no occasions where the Comhairle failed to provide temporary accommodation for anyone requiring it that night. Some applicants had slept rough in other local authority areas before applying to the Comhairle.
- 6.11 The main reason given for presenting as homeless in the Outer Hebrides, as shown below, is a dispute within the household with 54% of applicants citing this as the reason for homelessness in 202/22. This is higher than the 42.5% presenting in the previous year and possibly reflects the pressures associated with the cost of living crisis. Of those who presented due to a relationship breakdown in 2022/23, 19% stated that there was abuse in the relationship.

Chart 8 – Technical Reasons for Homelessness in the Outer Hebrides 2020/21-2022/23



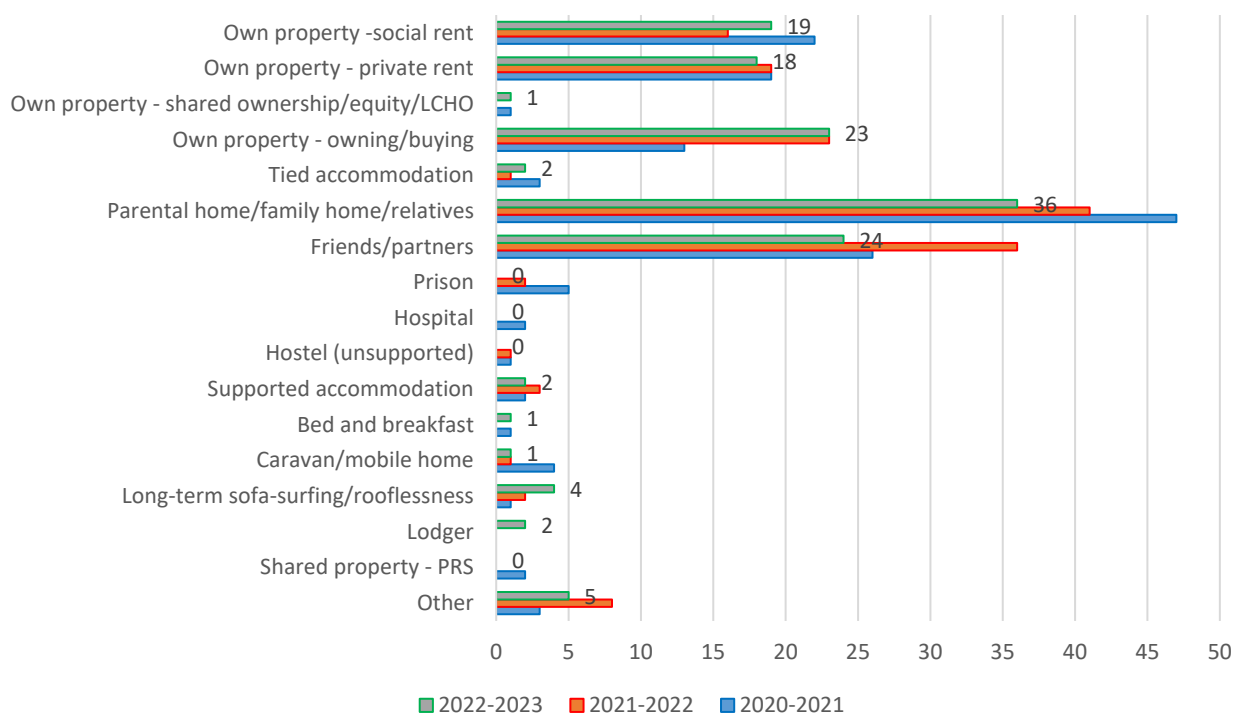
6.12 Underlying reasons for failing to maintain the household’s existing accommodation are shown at Chart 9. Only 6% of households stated that financial difficulties, debt or unemployment was a contributing factor to their homelessness although the true figure is likely to be higher than this. The main contributory factors given to the Comhairle were mental health reasons with 16% of all applicants stating that this was a contributing factor to their homelessness, and a physical health reason which was cited by 9% of applicants. Only 5% of all applicants stated that alcohol and/or drug dependency was a factor. This is likely to be due to an unwillingness to disclose full personal circumstances at the initial interview. Support needs are shown at Table 2 on page 15.

Chart 9: Underlying reasons for failing to maintain accommodation in the Outer Hebrides 2020/21-2022/23



6.13 Of the 136 households who applied in 2022-2023, 60 (44%) had been living with friends or relatives while 61 (45%) had been living in their own property (i.e. which they either rented or owned) as shown at Chart 10 below.

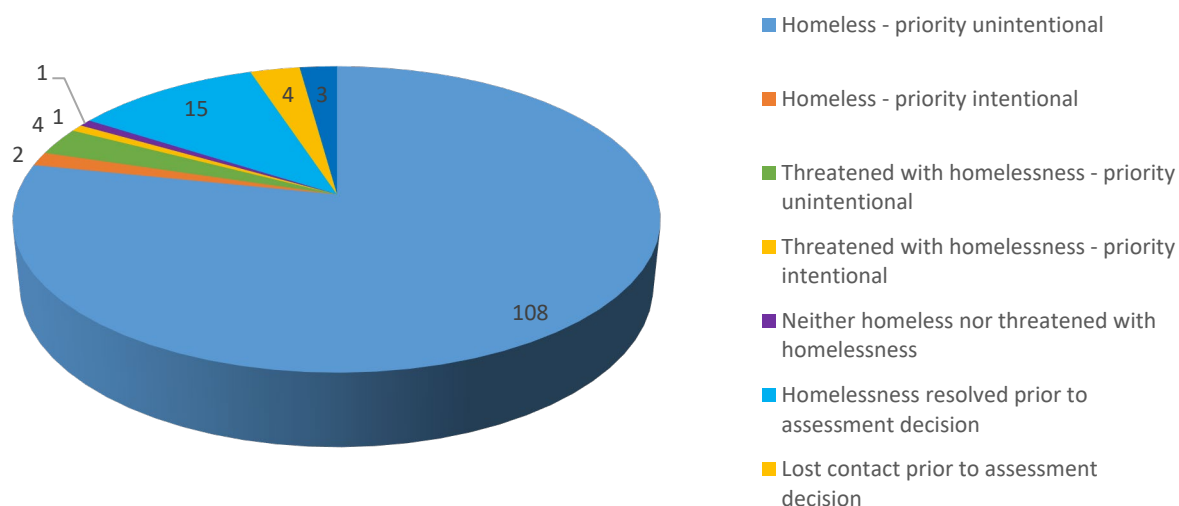
Chart 10 – Prior housing circumstances of applicants in the Outer Hebrides 2020/21-2022/23



HOMELESSNESS ASSESSMENTS

- 7.1 In the year 2022-2023, 18 households resolved their homelessness or withdrew their application prior to an assessment being made, often due to a relationship breakdown being resolved. Only one household was assessed as neither homeless nor potentially homeless. Contact was lost with four households prior to an assessment decision being made. Of the remaining 115 households assessed as homeless or potentially homeless, 112 (97.4%) were assessed as unintentionally homeless or threatened with homelessness. A further three (2.6%) were found to be intentionally homeless. No households were ineligible for assistance. Across Scotland 98.4% were assessed as unintentionally homeless or threatened with homelessness, and 1.6% as intentionally homeless.
- 7.2 As of 29 November 2022, local connection provisions for the referral of applicants to another authority were suspended for all those applying having come from another local authority in Scotland. Referrals may still be made to authorities outwith Scotland but the Comhairle now has a duty to permanently accommodate any unintentionally homeless household who presents to this authority from anywhere within Scotland. The Scottish Government are in regular contact with local authorities to monitor the impact of these changes. Movement between local authorities is being recorded. To date, there has been little impact for the Comhairle. In 2022-2023 five households with no local connection made a homelessness application to the Comhairle prior to 29 November 2022, while only one applied between this date and 31 March 2023. There have, however, been several phone calls from people outwith this local authority interested in moving to the Outer Hebrides to make a homelessness presentation, but these have not translated into actual presentations.

Chart 11– Assessment of homeless applications 2022-2023



TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

- 8.1 There are presently 68 temporary accommodation units in operation throughout the Outer Hebrides. The Comhairle leases 30 of these from HHP and owns the remaining 38, of which 24 are based in The Acres. Fifty-five households were being accommodated on 31 March 2023.
- 8.2 In 2022/23, the Comhairle accommodated 5 homeless households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation with an average length of stay of 5 days, a decrease of 82% on the length of stay for 2021/22 and an overall decrease of 97% since 2019/20. The Comhairle has continued to reduce its use of Bed and Breakfasts for temporary accommodation (an aim which was temporarily inhibited by the impact of the pandemic) and there was only one breach of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order in 2022/23 with a stay of 11 days. The Order is breached when any household is accommodated in what is legally classed as unsuitable accommodation for more than seven days, with a few exceptions such as being accommodated due to a fire or flood.
- 8.3 A further 97 households were provided with furnished temporary accommodation, 44 of these in The Acres. It should be noted that these figures reflect households whose cases have been closed in the year. The average length of stay in self-contained accommodation was 27 weeks, and 31 weeks for The Acres. The overall lengths of stay for households in temporary accommodation decreased by 13.6% in 2022/23 from 220 days to 190 days. The average total time spent in temporary accommodation in Scotland in 2022/23 was 223 days. This figure has increased nationally for the past six years.

Chart 12 - Numbers of cases closed in the year provided with temporary accommodation in the Outer Hebrides 2018/19-2022/23 (weeks)

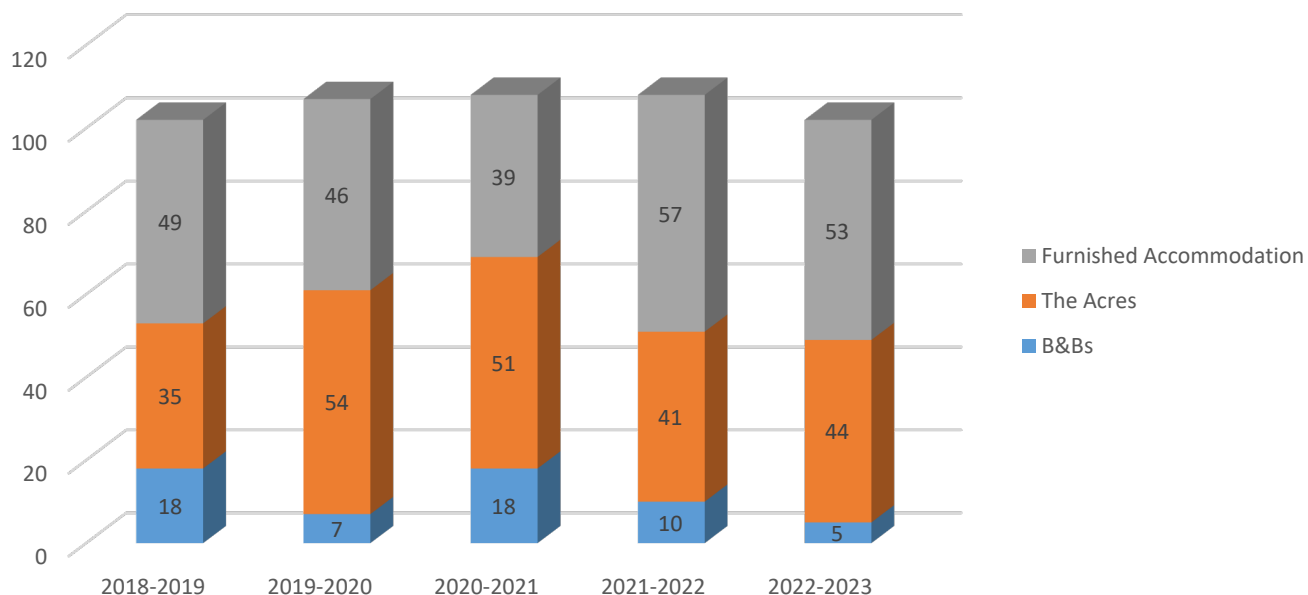
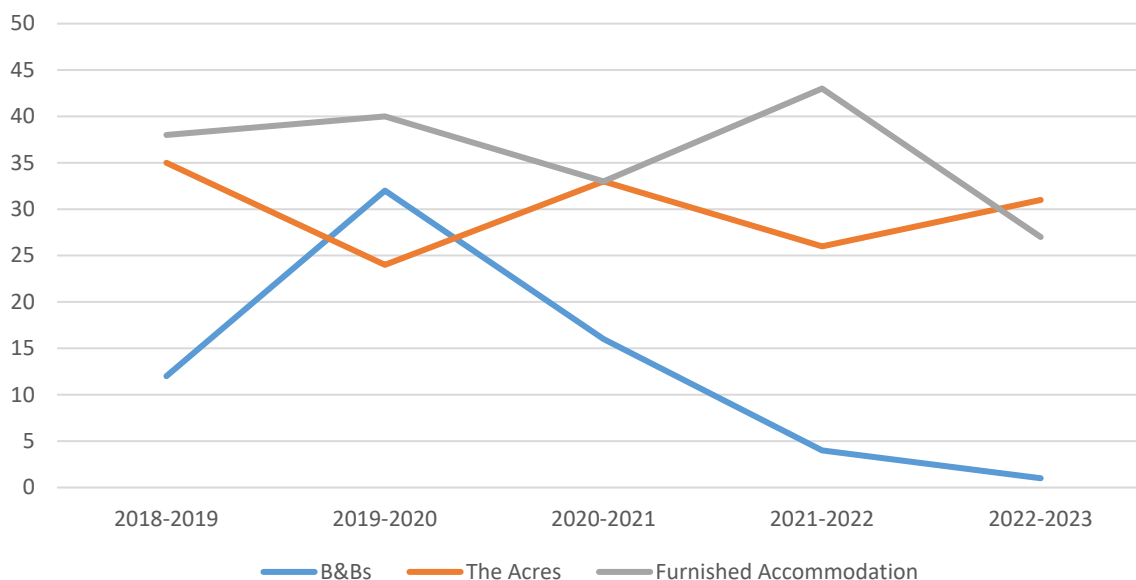


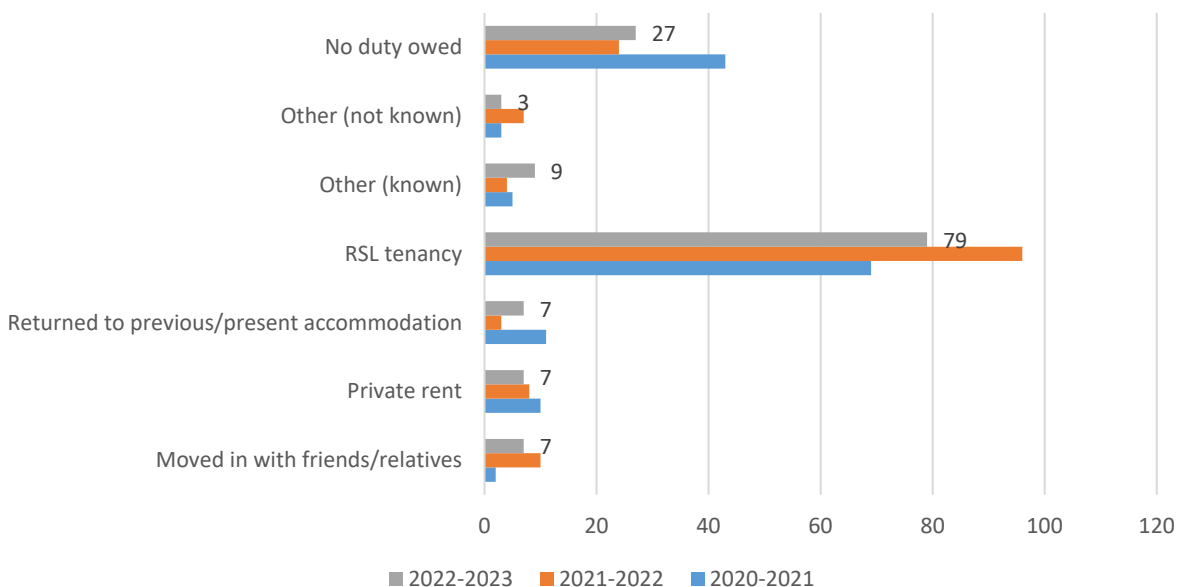
Chart 13 - Lengths of stay in temporary accommodation in the Outer Hebrides for closed cases 2018/19-2022/23 (weeks)



PERMANENT ACCOMMODATION

9.1 At the date of writing this report, 76 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% decrease in the numbers waiting compared to the same date in 2021/22. In the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, 74 homeless households were provided with a permanent tenancy under homelessness legislation. This figure represents 29% of all allocations made in the Western Isles, which is a 9% decrease from the proportion of all allocations made in the Western Isles in the preceding year. It also represents 67% of the proportion of new homeless demand in the year, also a 9% decrease on the preceding year. A further five households were housed permanently in another local authority. Chart 14 shows the housing outcomes for all cases closed in 2020/21 to 2022/23.

Chart 14 - Known outcomes for homeless households in the Outer Hebrides for cases closed in 2020/21 – 2022/23.

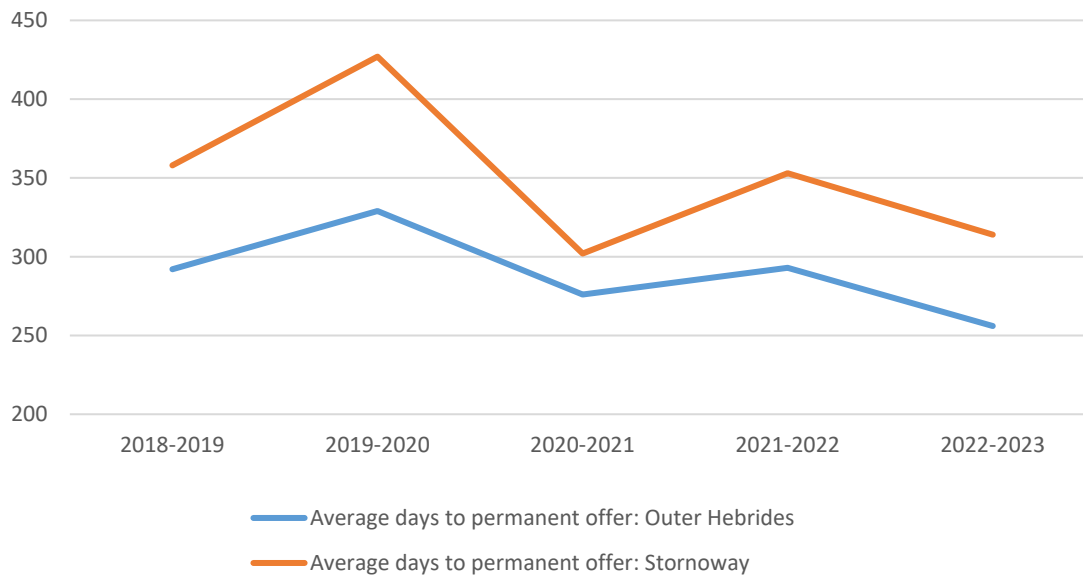


9.2 Stornoway continues to be the most pressurised area. Of all social housing allocations made in 2022/23 in Stornoway, 49.5% were to statutory homeless household. This was just short of the 50% target agreed by HHP. The greatest pressure is on the two-apartment list. In 2022/23 HHP allocated 49 two-apartment properties in total, of which 29, or 59%, were made to statutory homeless. At the date of writing this report 23 homeless households are awaiting an offer of a two-apartment property in Stornoway. This is a reduction of 20% on the preceding year. Waiting list times for two and five apartment properties are the longest historically and this impacts on the number of allocations that HHP are able to make. However, pressure has increased on the three-apartment list. There are currently 17 households waiting for an offer of a three-apartment property in Stornoway.

9.3 In order to seek to address some of the pressure on the two-apartment list, and to progress towards rapid rehousing, HHP agreed to allocate 25, two-apartment properties in Stornoway in the year up to the end of May 2023 and have committed to the same for a further year. This temporary target, which was met for the first year and exceeded last year, will be reviewed again after 12 months. Its impact is evidenced by a 20.6% reduction over the last two years in the two-apartment waiting list where Stornoway is the first area of choice.

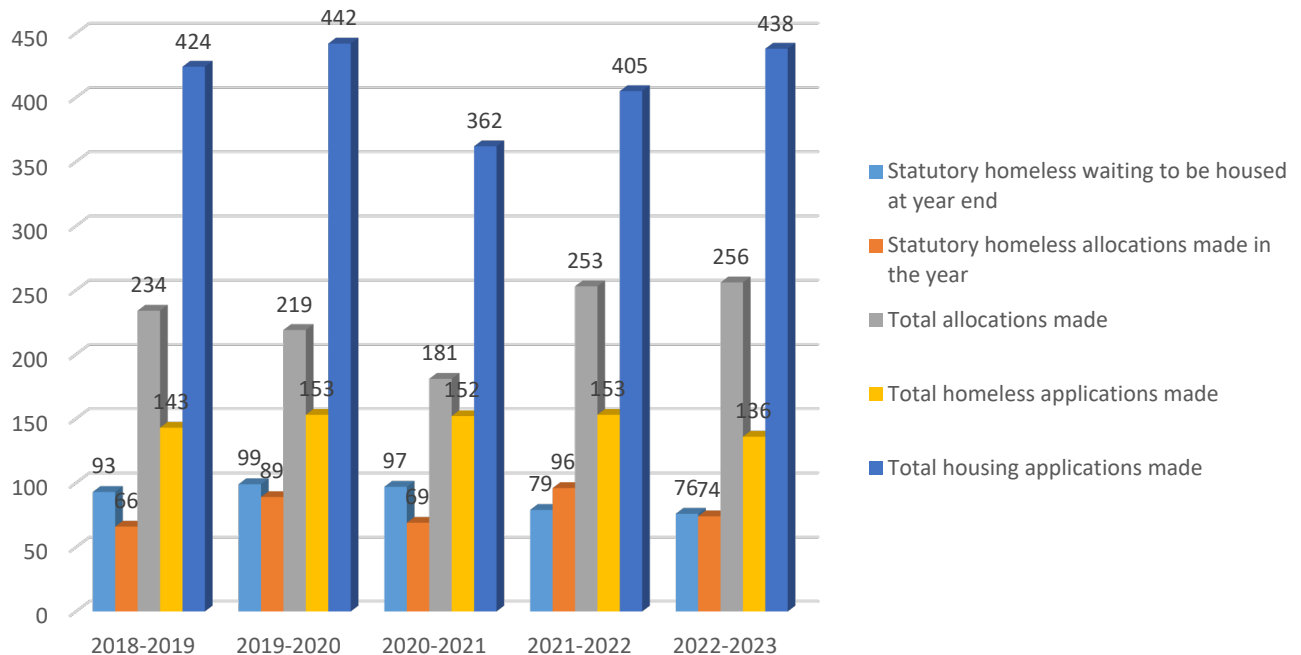
9.4 The average length of time taken to make a first offer of permanent housing to statutory homeless households was 245 days in 2022/23, a 14% decrease on the 285 days taken in 2021/22. It took an average of 256 days, a 12.6% decrease on the preceding year, for all priority homeless households to be housed as some households wait for a second offer of housing. 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 2022/23, 42% of first offers were made within 3 months. 41.5% of first offers were made within three months across Lewis and Harris, and 45.5% of first offers were made within three months in Uist and Barra.

Chart 15 – Average waiting times (days) to being permanently housed for cases closed in the year 2018/19 – 2022/23



9.5 Chart 17 below illustrates housing trends over the past 5 years and the associated pressures on waiting lists. The series ‘statutory homeless waiting to be housed’ represents the number recorded on 31 March each year. This year’s decrease was the first significant decrease for ten years.

Chart 16 – Housing and homelessness trends 2018/19-2022/23



9.6 In the period 2022/23, six statutory homeless households were accommodated permanently through the private sector. This represents 5.4% of all new homeless demand. Using both social and private lets as housing outcomes for statutory homeless, the Comhairle permanently housed 66% of the new homeless demand for the year.

HOMELESSNESS SUPPORT PROVISION

- 10.1 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 2021/22 there were 38 new referrals made to this service.
- 10.2 The Comhairle also works closely with partner agencies in the statutory and third sectors to make referrals for support as appropriate. These include Adult Services, Education and Children's Services, Health, Western Isles Citizen's Advice Bureau, Eilean Siar Food Bank, Uist and Barra Foodbank, Hebrides Alpha, Dochas, Cothrom, the Salvation Army and other local Churches.
- 10.3 The Comhairle is now making good progress in the development of Housing First Support with the first tenancy commencing in 2020 and six tenancies in place by the end of March 2023. One client 'stood down' from Housing First and a further one sadly passed away. Housing First moves away from the 'tenancy readiness' culture and language and removes barriers to accessing social housing such as requiring detailed tenancy histories. Where support needs are identified, these are addressed in the person's own settled home following the six principles of Housing First which have been well evaluated and proven to have very high levels of success. Housing First support is offered to homeless people with multiple and complex needs and or a pattern of repeat homelessness, and partnership working is integral to its success.
- 10.4 The Comhairle continues to provide assistance to homeless households securing a permanent tenancy by recycling second hand furniture offered by the general public. This supplements any provision secured through the Welfare Fund. Homeless clients are also assisted to access food parcels from local schemes. Tesco and the Coop regularly provide produce due to go out of date to The Acres. The High Free Church provide lunch to the residents on Sundays. Food parcels are distributed to all homeless households in temporary accommodation at Christmas and Christmas gifts are supplied by Martin's Memorial Church.
- 10.5 Tenancy sustainment levels continue to be high with 92% of the 96 homeless applicants housed permanently under homelessness legislation in 2021-2022 sustaining their tenancy for more than one year. Only one of the 8 tenancies that were not sustained would be regarded as a failed tenancy as the rest were given up for positive reasons such as moving in with a partner or moving away for employment. For all households housed by HHP from the general waiting list in 2021-2022, 90% sustained their tenancy for more than one year.
- 10.6 Households applying as homeless are asked if they have any of a number of support needs. In 2022/23 37% of applicants stated that they required support due to a mental health issue. This is a decrease from the 44% in 2021/22 but still higher than the 33% in 2020/21. A further 9% stated that they required support due to a drug or alcohol dependency, but this is lower than the actual figure due to an initial failure or unwillingness to disclose. Multiple and complex needs are not uncommon. Of all households who identified a support need, 34 had more than one need, 25% of all homeless households.

Table 2 – Support needs as identified by household when making homeless application 2020/21-2022/23

Support Need	Number of applicants		
	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Mental health	50	67	50
Learning disability	14	8	5
Physical disability	12	18	11
Medical condition	28	34	29
Drug or alcohol dependency	20	11	12
Basic housing management/independent living skills	13	8	10

NORTH AND ISLANDS HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING OPTIONS HUB

11.1 The Comhairle participates in the North & Islands Homelessness and Housing Options Hub which continues to meet monthly by MS Teams in order to update each other on homelessness matters. Meetings are attended by at least one Scottish Government Official. The Scottish Government has provided funding to at least cover administrative costs. This funding is around £10,000 per year.

RAPID REHOUSING TRANSITION PLAN 2019/20-2023/24

12.1 The Comhairle has submitted a third update of its Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) to the Scottish Government and is awaiting feedback. There has been good progress in most areas. The newly Revised RRTP is attached at Appendix 1.

12.2 The Scottish Government have provided funding to assist local authorities with implementing and progressing their RRTPs. The Comhairle received £50,000 for 2021/22 and 2022/23. A further £50,000 has been awarded for 2023/24. The majority of this funding has, to date, been allocated to Housing First and to employing staff to facilitate this.

REVIEWS AND COMPLAINTS

13.1 There were no appeals against homeless determinations or offers of temporary or permanent accommodation in 2022/23.

13.2 There were two formal complaints made about the Homelessness Service in 2022/23. These were resolved at stage 1 of the complaint procedure.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

14.1 The Homelessness Service User Questionnaire has 3 stages: initial interview, temporary accommodation and an exit questionnaire. Return rates are generally low at between 5% and 8%. Of all responses received, 100% were very satisfied with the initial interview, 100% 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 17 - Initial Interview satisfaction ratings 2022-2023 (11 returns)

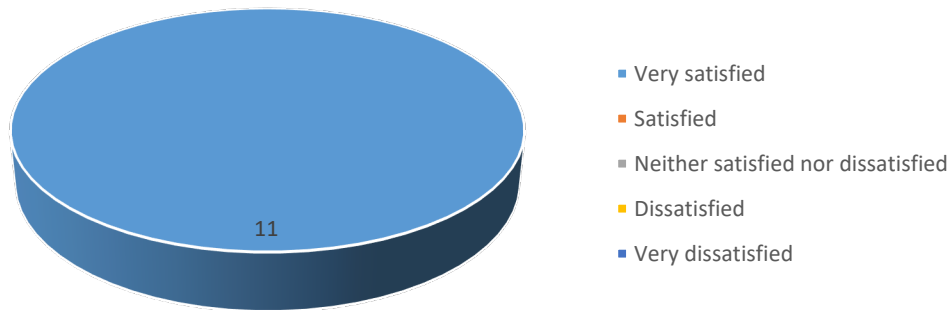


Chart 18 – Temporary Accommodation satisfaction ratings 2022-2023 (7 returns)

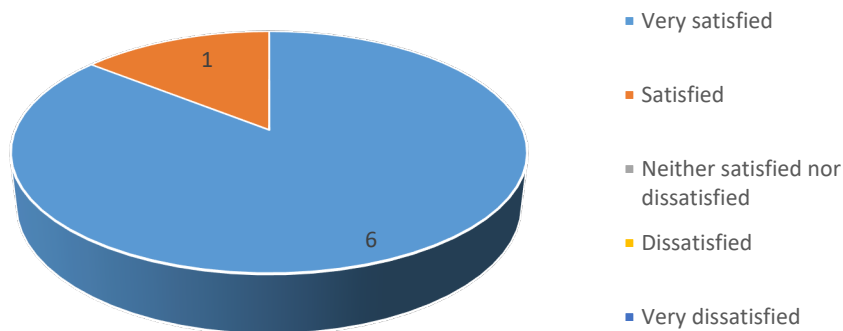
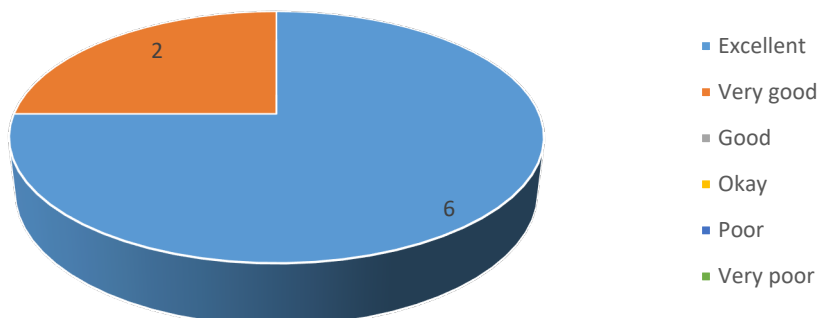


Chart 19 - Exit Questionnaire overall satisfaction ratings 2022-2023 (8 returns)



14.2 The Comhairle’s homelessness standards and targets are illustrated in the table below. In 2022-2023 the Comhairle at least met 7 out of the 10 relevant targets.

Table 3 – Homelessness Performance Management Framework

Standard	Type	Actual 2020- 2021	Actual 2021- 2022	Target 2022- 2023	Actual 2022- 2023
Initial Interview					
Interview applicants within 1 working day (unless applicant specifies otherwise)	CNES ³	100%	98%	90%	100%
Determinations					
Applicants to be advised of homelessness decision within 28 days of interview	SG ⁴ /SHRIP ₅	94%	87%	80%	90%
Reduction in number of Lost Contacts	SHRIP	0.6%	3.2%	10%	2.8%
%age of homeless cases reassessed within 12 months of completion of duty	SPI ⁶	5.7%	2.3%	n/a	2.2%
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	100%	100%	100%	100%
Breaches of unsuitable accommodation order	SG	0	4	0	1

³ Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

⁴ Scottish Government

⁵ Scottish Housing Regulator Improvement Plan

⁶ Statutory Performance Indicator

Permanent Accommodation					
90 days to first offer	CNES	25%	29%	25%	42%
Second offer within 90 days of first offer	CNES	57%	52%	90%	42%
%age of priority need households housed	SPI	76%	76%	n/a	73%
Tenancy Sustainment for over 12 months	CNES	98.5%	100%	100%	99%
Appeals					
Appeal heard within 14 working days of receipt of appeal	CNES	n/a	n/a	100%	n/a
Applicant informed of decision within 3 working days of appeal	CNES	n/a	n/a	100%	n/a
Complaints					
Complainant advised of outcome within 21 days of receipt of complaint	CNES	n/a	n/a	100%	100%

CONCLUSION

- 15.1 Homelessness applications in the Outer Hebrides decreased by 11% for the period of 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. This contrasted with the overall national picture where 26 authorities reported an increase. The average length of time taken for homeless households to be provided with permanent accommodation decreased by 12.6%. Overall lengths of stay in temporary accommodation decreased by 13.6%. The number of allocations being made to statutory homeless households decreased but due to the overall decrease in homeless presentations the backlog of those waiting still decreased by 5% to 76 households as of 31 March 2022. There are ongoing pressures on the two and five-apartment waiting lists, but HHP have committed to continue their target of allocating at least 25 two-apartment properties in Stornoway to statutory homeless households in the year up to the end of May 2024. As a result of this commitment the homeless list for two-apartment properties in Stornoway has reduced by 20.6% over the last two years.
- 15.2 The Comhairle has submitted a third annual revised version of its Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) to the Scottish Government and is awaiting feedback. There has been good progress in other areas. Six Housing First tenancies were in operation in the Western Isles by the end of March 2023.

- 15.3 The cost-of-living crisis is an ongoing concern and the Comhairle will continue to monitor and report on any impact on homelessness applications.
- 15.4 If the Comhairle is to continue to meet its statutory duties and to provide a good service to homeless households the Homelessness Service continues to be a vital resource.