



ENVIRONMENT AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES COMMITTEE: 4 JUNE 2013

HOMELESSNESS ANNUAL REPORT 2012-2013

Report by Director of Development

PURPOSE OF REPORT To provide the Comhairle with an update of homelessness issues covering the year 2012/13.

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 2012 – 31 March 2013, a total of 167 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 16 households were assisted under the housing options approach. Of these 16, three households went on to make a homeless presentation.
- 2.2 Of all homeless applications made to the Comhairle in 2012-2013, 128 were made to Lewis (8 of which were from Harris), 28 to Uist and 3 to Barra.
- 2.3 The Comhairle accepted a duty to permanently accommodate 97 households in this period and discharged its duty to 62 households by providing them with permanent accommodation.
- 2.4 The Scottish Government abolished the priority need homelessness test on 31 December 2012 thus entitling all unintentionally homeless households to settled accommodation from this date.

RECOMMENDATION

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

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Appendices: None

HOMELESS APPLICATIONS

- 4.1 During the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013, 167 homelessness applications were made to the Comhairle consisting of 190 adults and 81 children. This is a 5% decrease on last year's figure of 175 and reflects the national trend.
- 4.2 In 2011 to 2012, homelessness figures in Scotland fell by 19%. This substantial decrease is as a direct result of local authorities adopting a housing options approach, offering advice and information (e.g. financial advice, housing advice, mediation) to households threatened with homelessness in order to assist them to remain in their existing accommodation or to find alternative accommodation before becoming physically homeless.
- 4.3 The Comhairle has adopted a housing options approach since 1 October 2012 and in the first six months of practicing this approach, 16 households were assisted with only three of these households going on to make a homeless presentation. If the remaining 13 households had been interviewed as a homeless interview then the figure of homeless presentations for 2012 to 2013 would have been 180 households.
- 4.4 It is still too early to fully assess the impact of a housing options approach. Future reports to the Comhairle will allow more in-depth analysis over the next few years. It is anticipated that this approach will not have a significant overall impact in the Western Isles due to the limited private rented sector and overall lack of available housing options.

Chart 1 - Homeless Applications in the Western Isles 2004-2013

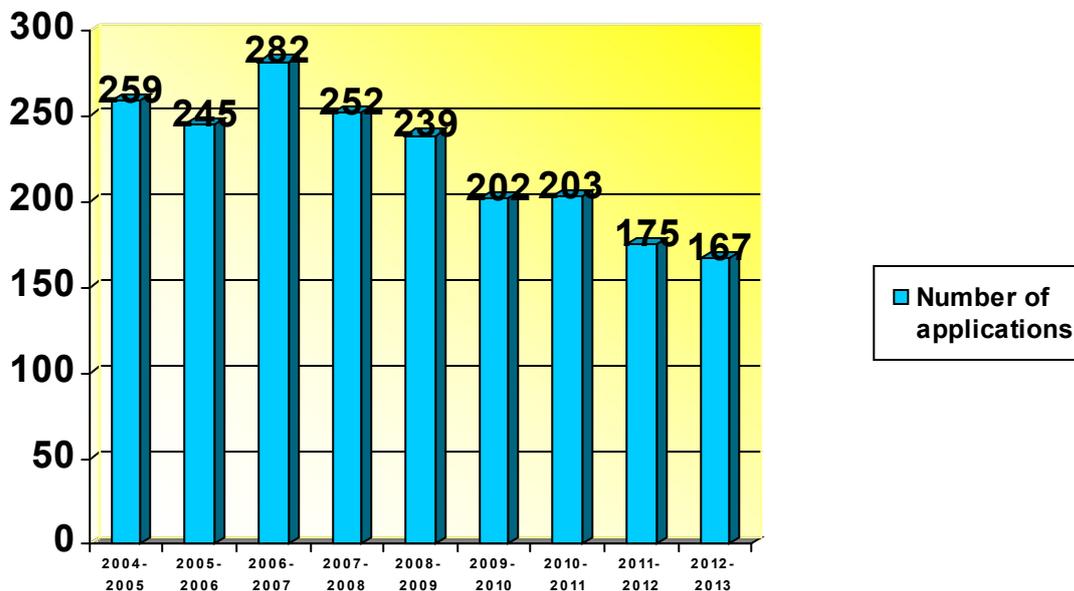
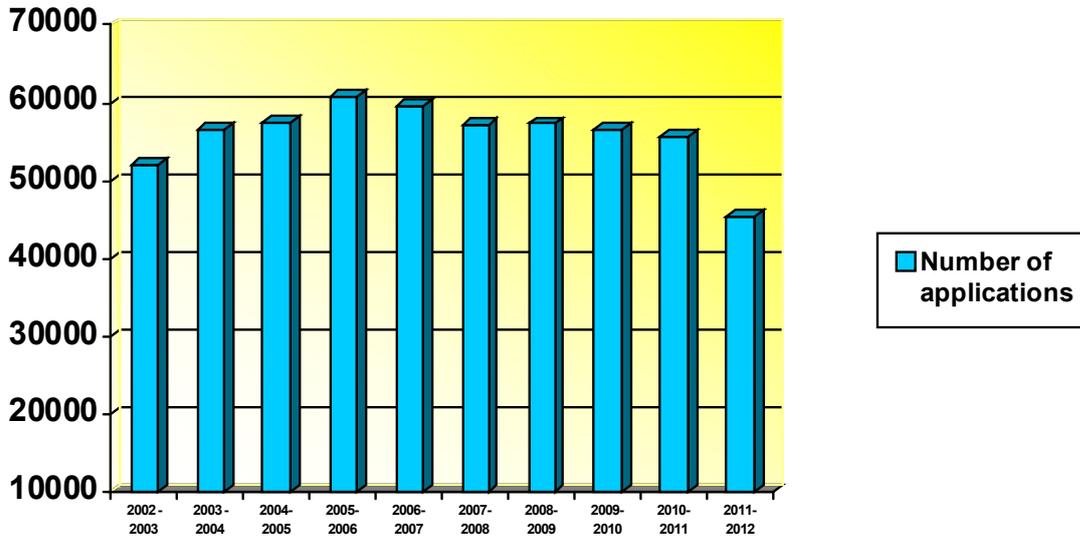


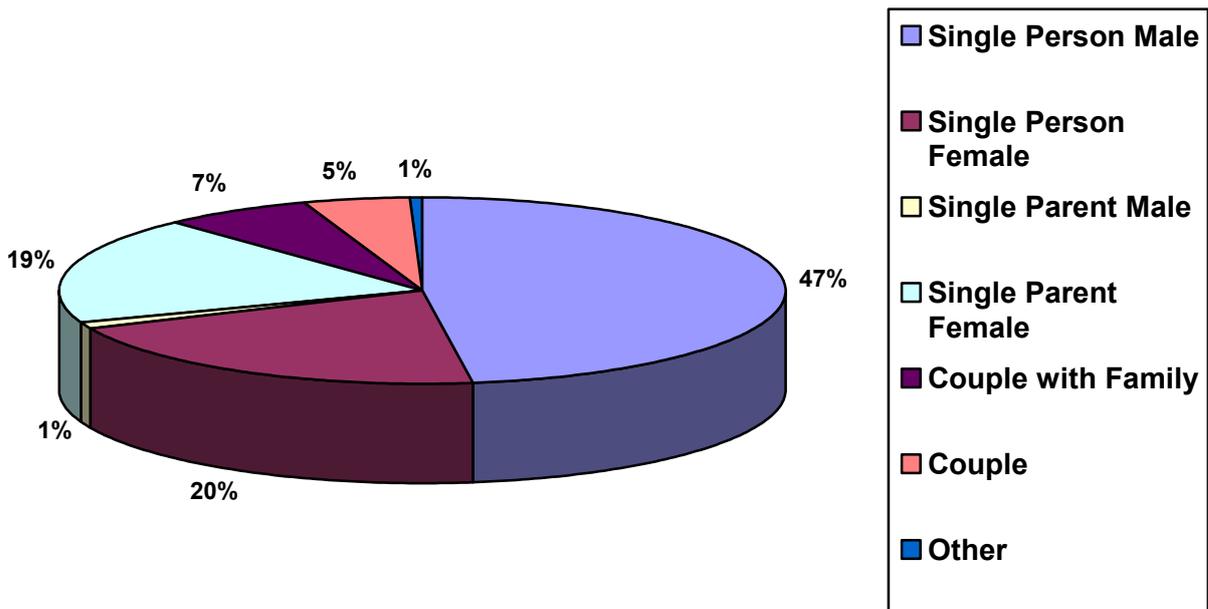
Chart 2 - Homeless Applications in Scotland 2002-2012



4.5 The majority of presentations continue to be made to Stornoway. Proportions presenting have remained fairly consistent across the area offices. Over this period 76.5% of presentations were from Lewis, 5% from Harris, 16.5% from Uist and 2% from Barra.

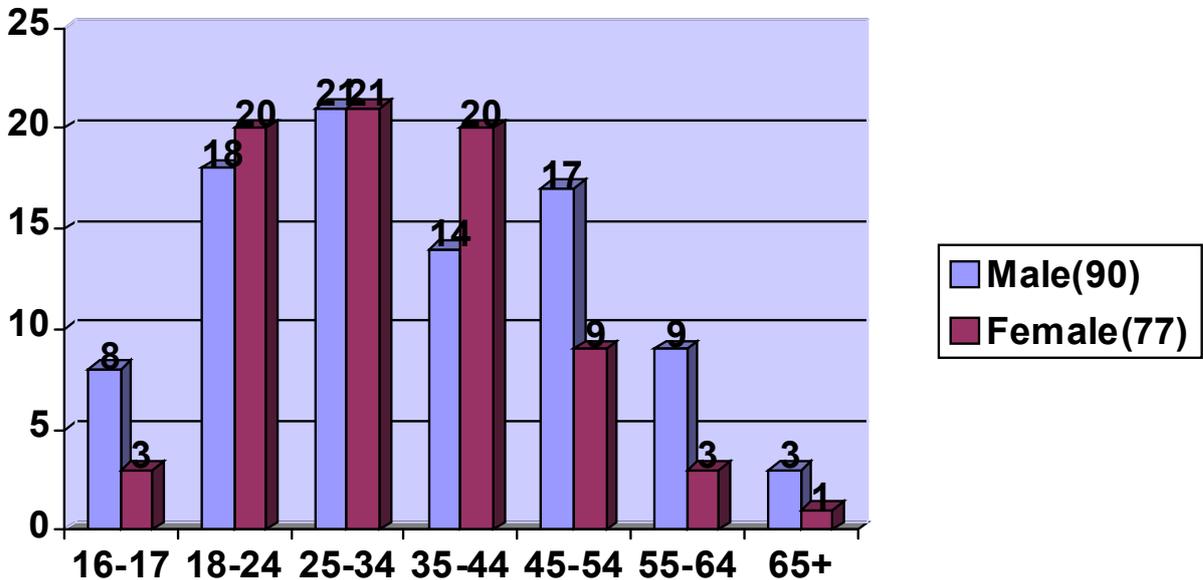
4.6 Household types presenting in the Western Isles generally remain consistent proportionately locally and nationally. The main household type presenting continues to be single people with 47% of applications being made by single men and 20% by single women.

Chart 3 – Homeless Applications in the Western Isles in 2012-2013 by Household Type



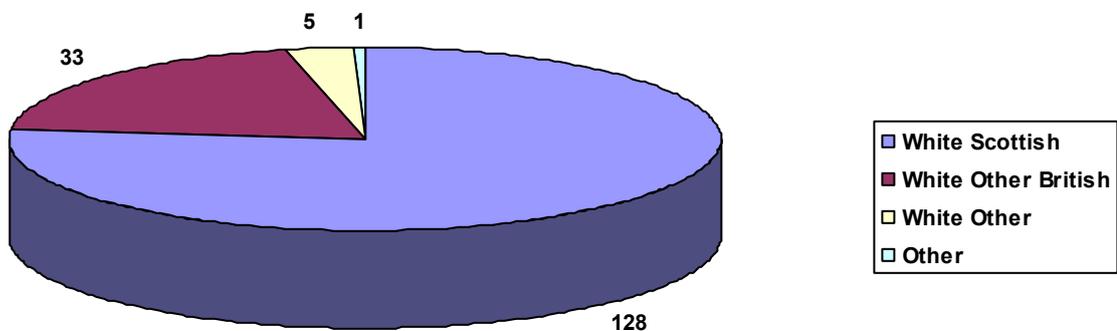
4.7 Applications can be broken down further into age ranges as shown below.

Chart 4 – Homeless Age Groups by Gender 2012-2013



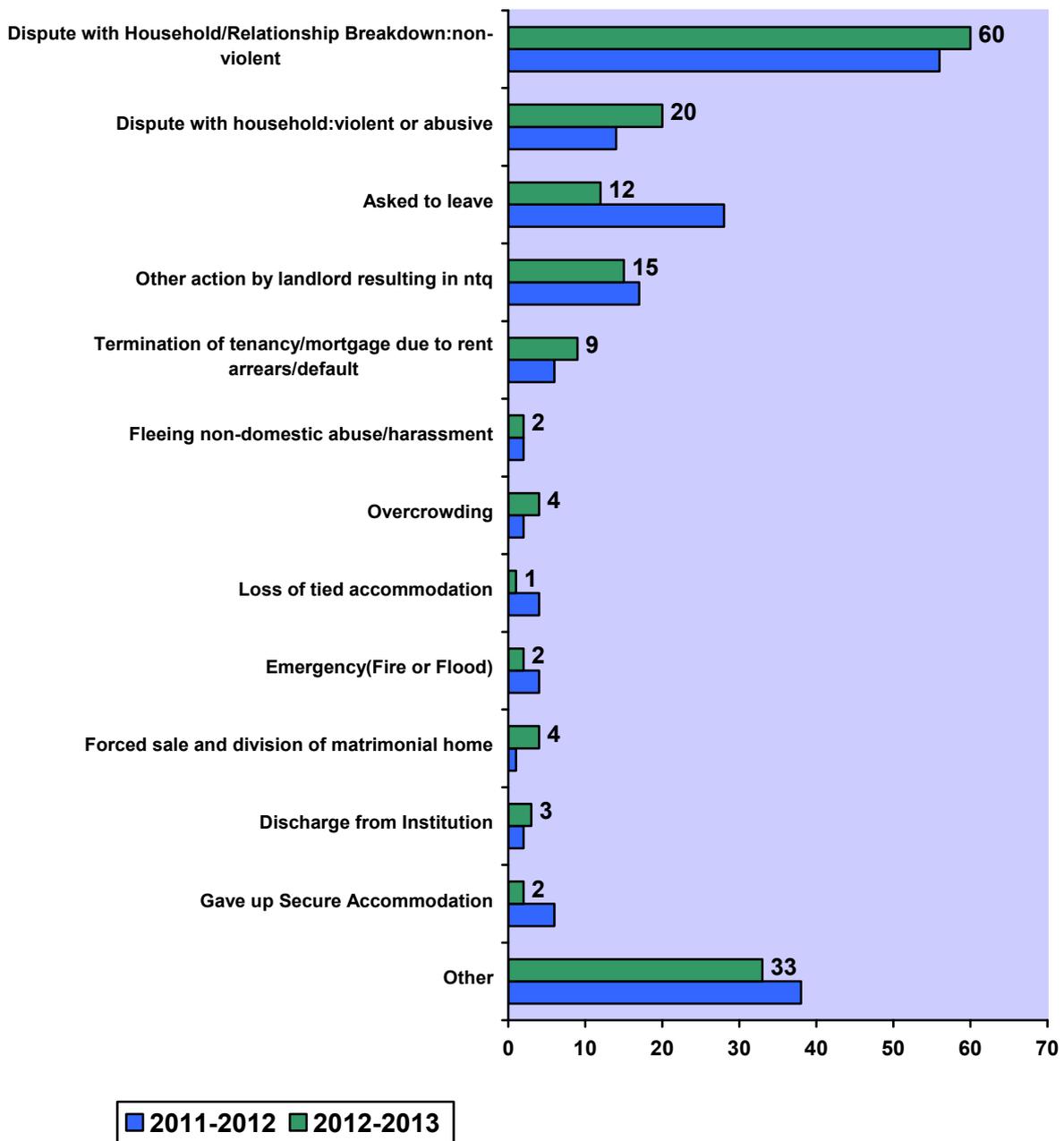
4.8 In all but one homeless application made in the Western Isles in 2012-2013 the main applicant was recorded as White. The remaining applicant's ethnicity was classed as 'other'. No applicants described themselves as a gypsy/traveller. A further five applicants stated that they had a physical disability. 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 2012-2013



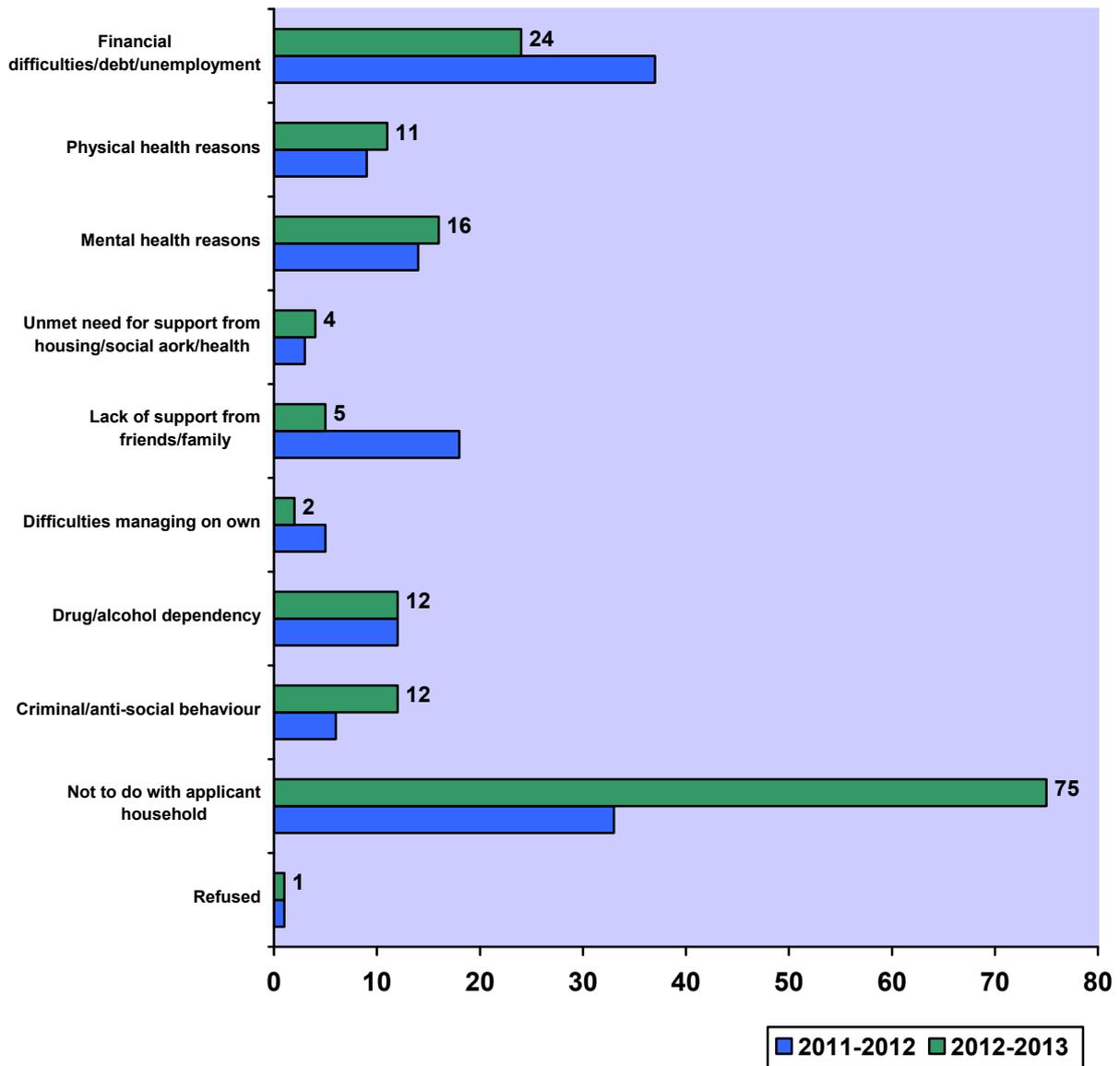
4.9 The main reason given for presenting as homeless continues to be a dispute within the household with 48% of applicants citing this as the reason for homelessness in 2012-2013. Of those who presented for this reason, a third stated that there was abuse in the relationship. These figures are higher than for the previous year. Throughout Scotland as a whole in 2011-2012, 28% of homelessness applications were because of a dispute in the household and 26% were because the applicant had been asked to leave.

Chart 6 - Technical Reasons for Homelessness in the Western Isles 2011-2012 and 2012-2013



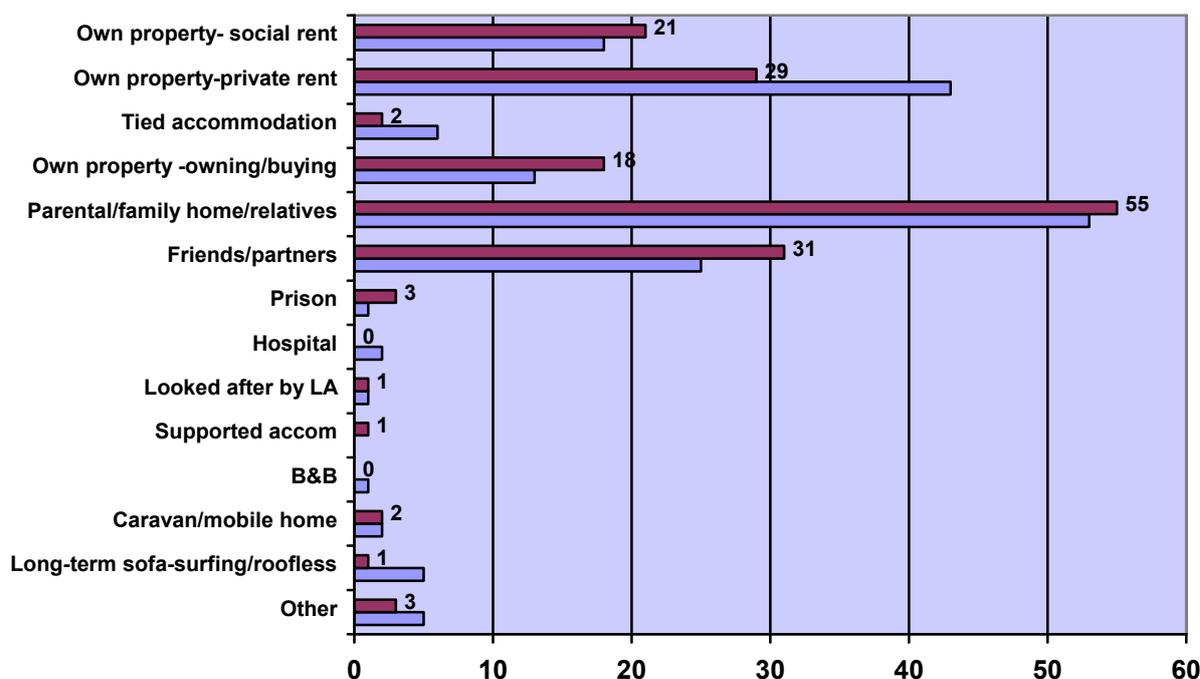
4.10 Underlying reasons for failing to maintain the household's existing accommodation are also investigated. Of all households who gave underlying reasons, the main contributory factor given was financial difficulties/debt/unemployment with 14% of applicants identifying this as an underlying cause, a decrease from the 21% of applicants in the preceding year. The actual number of households presenting as a result of rent arrears or mortgage default has risen slightly from 3 to 5%.

Chart 7 – Underlying reasons for failing to maintain accommodation in the Western Isles 2011-2012 and 2012-2013



- 4.11 Of the 167 households who applied in 2012-2013, 86 (51%) had been living with friends and relatives while 68 (41%) 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 2011-2012 and 2012-2013



HOMELESS ASSESSMENTS

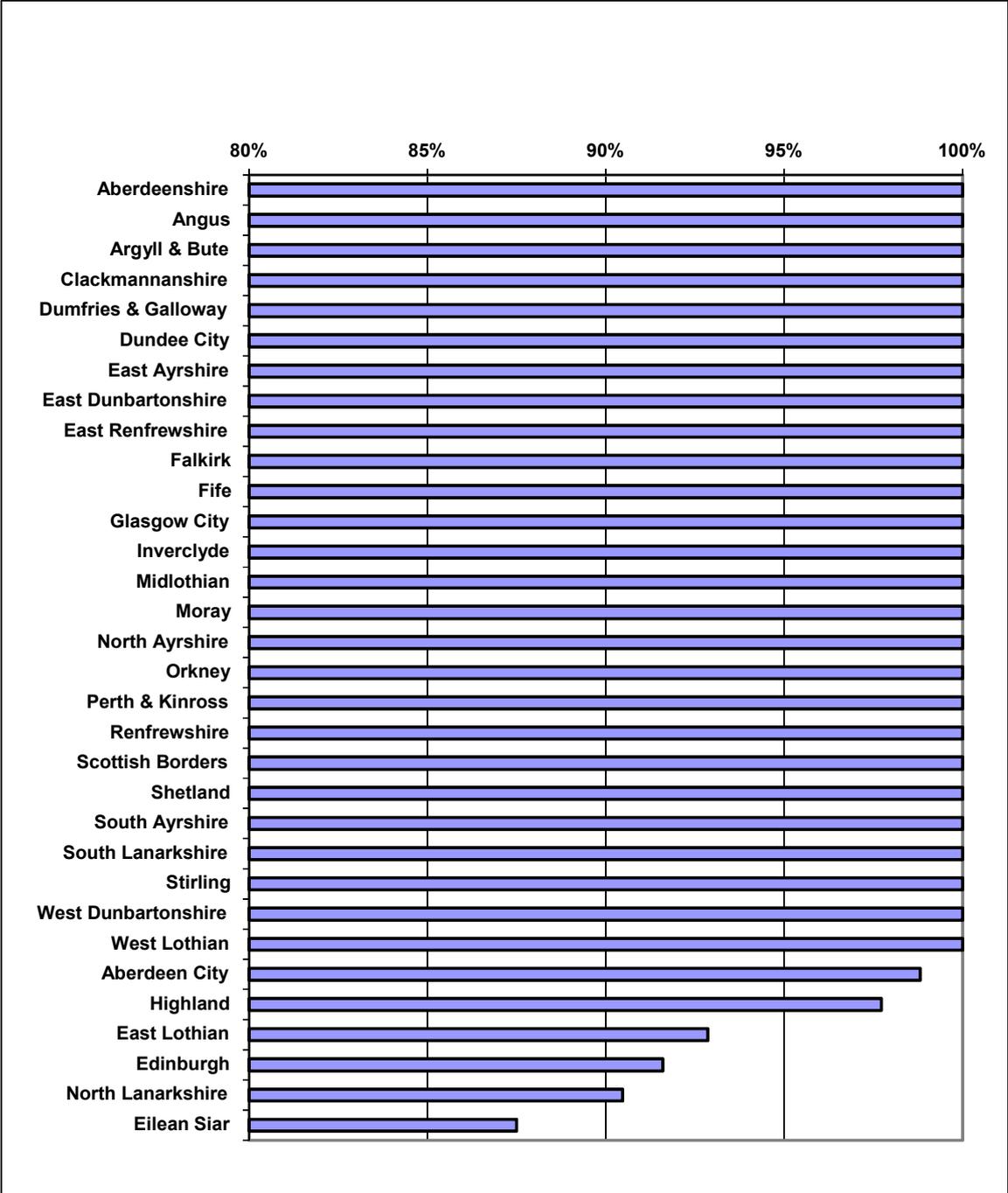
- 5.1 Numbers of cases with whom contact is lost or the application is withdrawn has decreased to 8%. In the year 2012-2013, 25 households resolved their homelessness prior to an assessment being made, often due to a relationship breakdown being resolved. Of the remaining 120 households assessed as homeless or potentially homeless, 87.5% were assessed as priority homeless and 12.5% non-priority. A total of 7% of all those households assessed as homeless or potentially homeless were deemed to be intentionally homeless. A total of 11 households were assessed as neither homeless nor threatened with homelessness.

Table 1 – Assessments of homeless applications 2010-2013

	2010-2011		2011-2012		2012-2013	
	CNES	Scotland	CNES	Scotland	CNES	Scotland
Priority homeless	67%	65%	54%	70%	62%	Not yet available
Non-priority homeless	13%	9%	21%	7%	9%	
Assessed as not homeless	9%	7%	3%	7%	6%	
Lost contact, withdrew etc.	11%	19%	19%	16%	23%	
All assessments	198	55,744	173	45,995	167	

5.2 By the end of December 2012 (the last date for which national figures are currently available), 26 local authorities in Scotland were assessing 100% of homeless households as priority homeless. The Comhairle had the lowest priority need assessment rate in Scotland at 88%. The Scottish Government abolished the priority need homelessness test on 31 December 2012 thus entitling all unintentionally homeless households to settled accommodation from this date.

Chart 9 – Percentage of homeless assessed as priority during December 2012



- 5.3 In the period 2012-2013, one household was assessed as having an unintentional priority need with no local connection. This household is presently in temporary accommodation. The suspension of local connection and improved rights for intentionally homeless households are not seen as priorities by Scottish Ministers at present and there are still no proposed dates for their implementation.

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 two years 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. The North & Islands Hub is currently finalising the action plan for 2013-2015.

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

- 7.1 There are presently 52 operational homeless temporary accommodation units throughout the Western Isles. The Comhairle provides 18 of these from its own stock, leases a further 31 properties from HHP, and leases three properties in Barra from the private sector, one having been added recently. The Comhairle continues to depend on Bed and Breakfast establishments to meet the shortfall in temporary accommodation. At the date of writing this Report the Comhairle was providing 23 households with Bed and Breakfast accommodation. Pressure on this type of accommodation will reduce significantly when the 24 bedroom shared temporary accommodation unit, scheduled for completion in March 2014, is fully operational.
- 7.2 In 2011/12, the Comhairle accommodated 64 homeless households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation with an average length of stay of 21 weeks, a 12% decrease on the figure for 2011/12. It should be noted that the average length of stay is recorded only for households who have moved on in the period and that there are presently 23 households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
- 7.3 Of all homeless households provided with Bed and Breakfast accommodation in this period one contained a pregnant woman who spent more than two weeks in Bed and Breakfast. As the stay lasted for longer than two weeks, the Comhairle did not satisfy the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order once in 2012-2013. However, it is encouraging that the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for households with children or a pregnant woman has decreased over the past few years due to the overall increase in operational homeless units.
- 7.4 The Comhairle recorded a further 51 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 34 weeks, a slight decrease on last year. The phasing out of priority need is likely to further increase lengths of stay for these households due to the pressure on available permanent stock.

Chart 10 – Numbers of cases closed in the year provided with temporary accommodation in the Western Isles 2008-2013

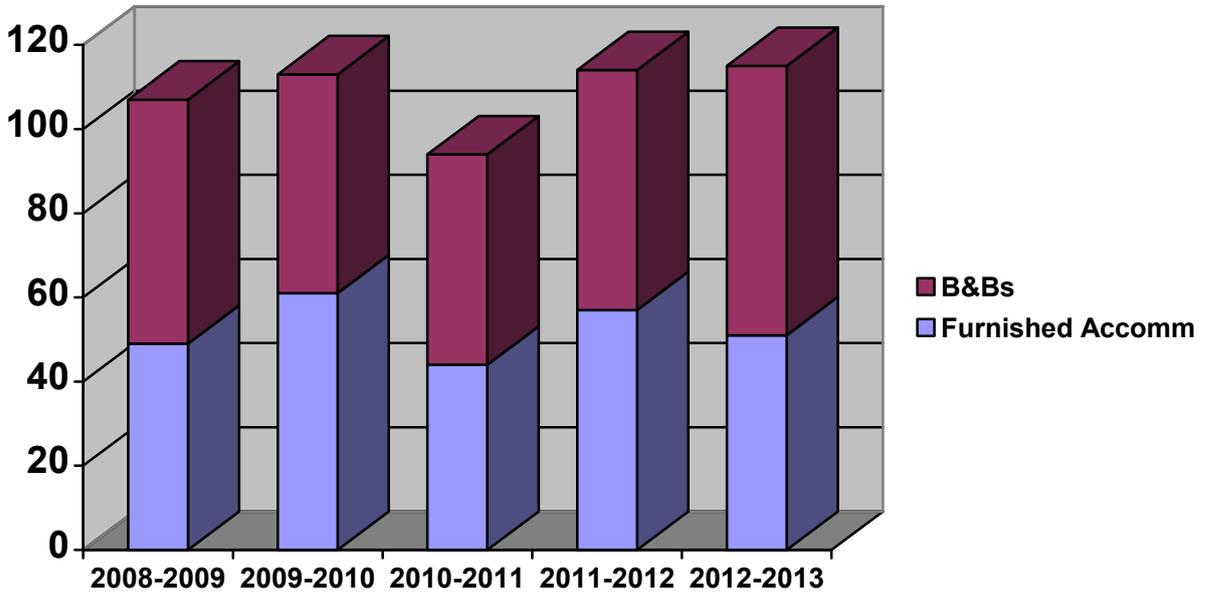
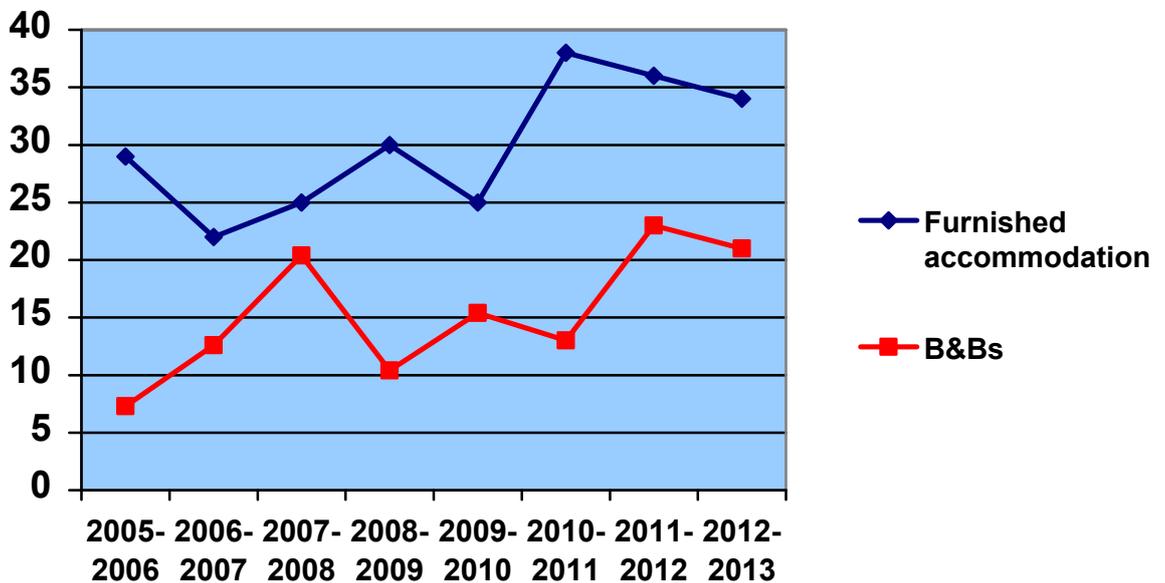


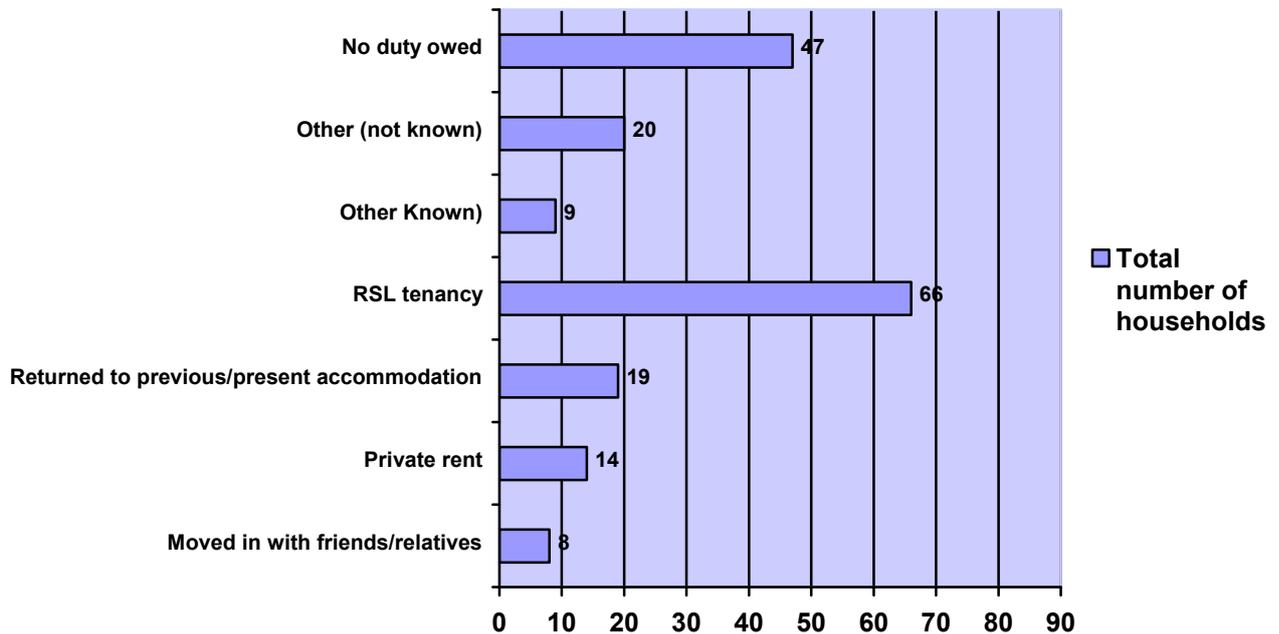
Chart 11 – Lengths of stay in temporary accommodation in the Western Isles for closed cases 2005-2012 (weeks)



PERMANENT ACCOMMODATION

- 8.1 At the date of writing this Report, 78 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 an 8% increase in the numbers waiting compared to the same date in 2011/12. In the period 2012/13, 62 homeless households were provided with a permanent tenancy under homelessness legislation. This figure represents 29% of all allocations made in the Western Isles, a slight decrease on the 32% of all allocations in the preceding year. Chart 8 shows the housing outcomes for all cases closed in 2012/13.

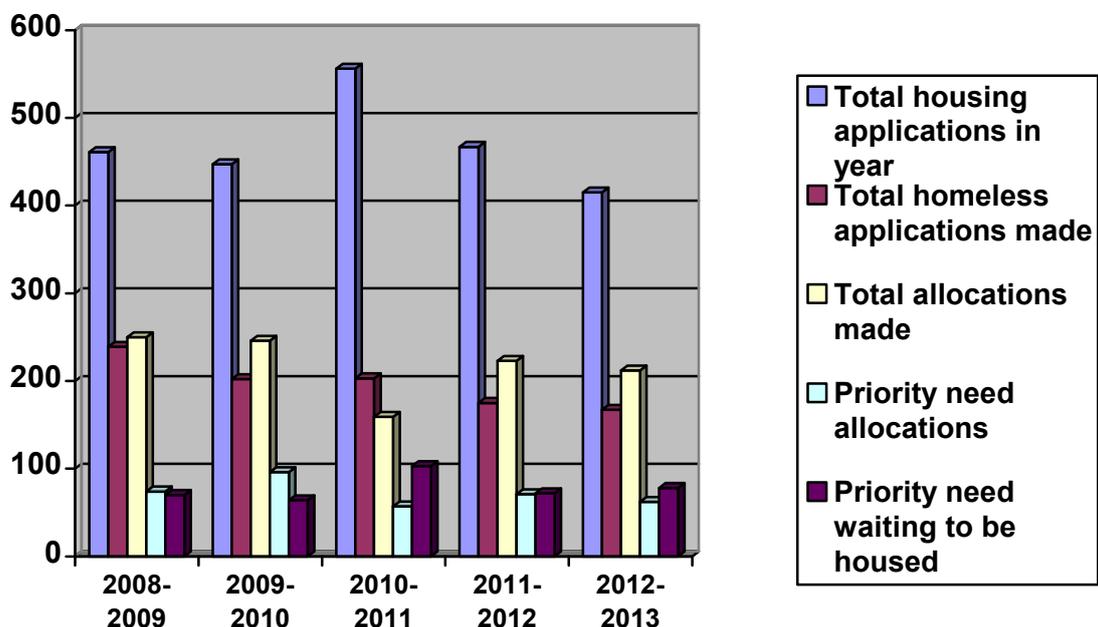
Chart 12 – Known outcomes for homeless households in the Western Isles for cases closed in 2012-2013



8.2 Stornoway continues to be the most pressurised area. Of all social housing allocations made in 2012/13 in Stornoway, 49% were to homeless households. This almost meets HHP's target to allocate 50% of properties in Stornoway to homeless households.

8.3 It is anticipated that the phasing out of priority need at the end of 2012 will in time increase the pressure on the general housing waiting list, increase the length of time to a first offer to homeless households and therefore increase the lengths of stay in temporary accommodation, which will further increase the pressure on the supply of temporary accommodation.

Chart 13 – Housing and homelessness trends 2008-2013



- 8.4 The average length of time taken to make a first offer of permanent housing to priority homeless households was 304 days in 2012/13, a 24% increase on the time taken in 2011/12. It took an average of 318 days for all priority homeless households to be housed as 8 households waited for a second offer. The increasing length of time taken reflects the mounting pressure on social housing and the difficulties in attaining a balance between homeless households and general waiting list applicants. Achieving this target is likely to become increasingly difficult with the phasing out of priority need given the high levels of homelessness against levels of void turnover.
- 8.5 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.

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 are finalised and the household is settled. In 2012/13 there were 32 referrals made to this service, 20 for Lewis and Harris and 12 for Uist and Barra.
- 9.2 The Care Inspectorate inspected the Homeless Support Service in March 2013 and have graded the service as follows (where 6 is the highest grade):
- | | | |
|--|---|-----------|
| • Quality of Care and Support | 6 | Excellent |
| • Quality of Staffing | 6 | Excellent |
| • Quality of Management and Leadership | 5 | Very good |

These grades reflect the excellent level of support currently being provided to homeless households.

- 9.3 On 21 November 2012, the Scottish Parliament passed secondary legislation on housing support regulations. These accompany the statutory housing support duty to commence on 1 June 2013, through which local authorities must assess and provide housing support for homeless or potentially homeless applicants to whom they have a duty to secure settled accommodation.
- 9.4 Housing support enables vulnerable people to maintain their tenancies, avoid repeat homelessness, and live independent, fulfilling lives in their communities. The duty and regulations will ensure that this vital support is assessed and provided for unintentionally homeless households in Scotland.
- 9.5 Scottish Government non-statutory guidance on housing support provision and regulations is expected to be released soon.
- 9.6 It is anticipated that the existing pressures on the Comhairle's Homeless Support Service will increase as a result.
- 9.7 Tenancy sustainment levels continue to be high with 100% of homeless applicants housed permanently under homelessness legislation in 2011-2012 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 2011-2012, 91% sustained their tenancy for more than one year although not all of those who didn't sustain their tenancy would be classed as failed tenancies.

- 9.8 In order to assist in preventing repeat homelessness for those households provided with permanent accommodation under homelessness legislation, the Comhairle operates a furnished tenancy grant, 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 2012-2013 the Comhairle assisted five households through the Furnished Tenancy Grant, and a further eight households were provided with a church starter pack or electrical pack provide by Scottish Southern Electric. Contributions of second hand furniture have reduced this year and options to develop this service will be explored, although lack of storage space is an ongoing constraint.
- 9.9 The Comhairle is currently reviewing its Rent Deposit Scheme in light of the phasing out of priority need. Rent deposits will be 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.

HOMELESS MEDIATION SERVICE

- 10.1 The Comhairle commenced with an inter-generational mediation service from 1 January 2013. The main duties of mediation involve building positive relationships with young people and their families in order to prevent homelessness while supporting the family and ensuring that any appropriate advice or information to assist in sustaining family relationships is given.
- 10.2 It is still too early to assess the impact of this service but reports on its progress and impact on youth homelessness will be submitted to Committee in future Homelessness Annual Reports.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

- 11.1 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.
- 11.2 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.

Table 3 – Support needs as identified by household when making homeless application 2012-2013

Support Need	Number of applicants
Mental health	28
Learning disability	4
Physical disability	5
Medical condition	16
Drug or alcohol dependency	23
Basic housing management/independent living skills	12

- 11.3 The Comhairle’s Homelessness Task Force meets quarterly to develop and monitor the Western Isles Homelessness Action Plan.
- 11.4 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 the hospital canteen and the Salvation Army to households in Bed and Breakfast establishments with limited or no cooking facilities. In the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013, 281 NHS vouchers were distributed, 31% more than in the preceding year.

REVIEWS AND COMPLAINTS

- 12.1 The Comhairle received one appeal against homelessness determinations made in 2012-2013, and no appeals against offers of permanent accommodation. This appeal did not proceed past the first stage of review.
- 12.2 There were no formal complaints made about the Homelessness Service in 2012/13.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

- 13.1 The Homelessness Service User Questionnaire has 3 stages: initial interview, temporary accommodation and an exit questionnaire. The return rate for the initial interview was 7% in 2012 to 2013. Of all responses, 91% were satisfied or very satisfied with their initial interview, 100% were satisfied or very satisfied with their temporary accommodation and 80% rated the overall service as good, very good or excellent.

Chart 14 - Initial Interview satisfaction ratings 2012-2013 (1=very satisfied, 5=very dissatisfied) (9 returns)

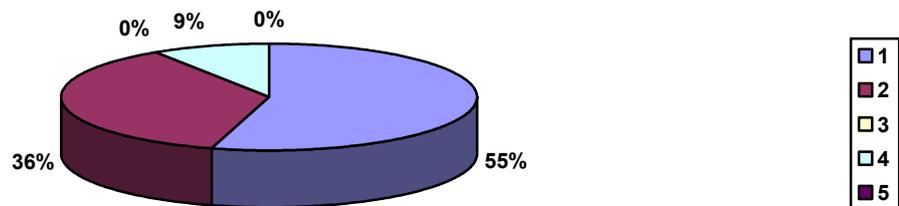


Chart 15 - Temporary Accommodation satisfaction ratings 2012-2013 (1= very satisfied, 5 = very dissatisfied) (4 returns)

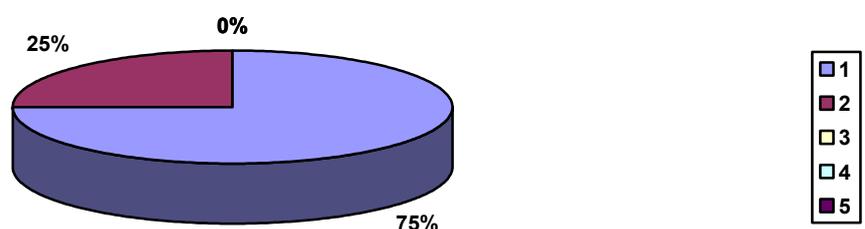
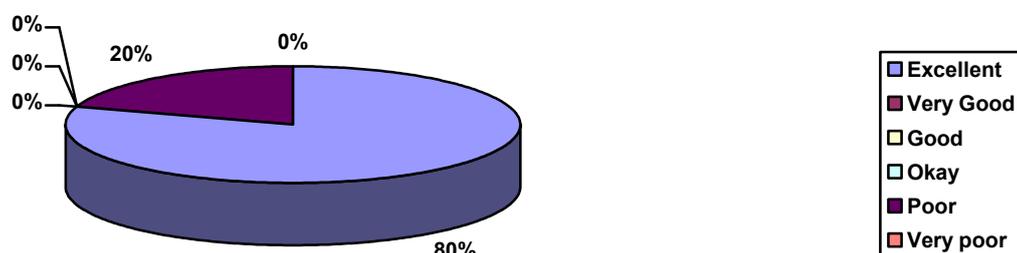


Chart 16 - Exit Questionnaire overall satisfaction ratings 2012-2013 (5 returns to date)



PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

14.1 The Comhairle has now rationalised all standards and targets into one framework as illustrated in the table below. In 2012-2013 the Comhairle at least met 5 out of the 9 relevant targets.

Table 4 - Homelessness Performance Management Framework

Standard	Type	Actual 2010-2011	Actual 2011-2012	Target 2012-2013	Actual 2012-2013
Initial Interview					
Interview applicants within 1 working day (unless applicant specifies otherwise)	CNES ¹	99%	97%	90%	96%
Determinations					
Applicants to be advised of homelessness decision within 28 days of interview	SG ² /SH RIP ³	84%	77%	80%	79%
Numbers of homeless applicants being assessed as priority need	SG	84%	70.4%	77%	87.5%
Reduction in number of Lost Contacts	SHRIP	4%	7%	10%	4%
%age of priority need cases reassessed within 12 months of completion of duty	SPI ⁴	3%	1.2%	n/a	9%
%age of non priority need cases reassessed within 12 months of completion of duty	SPI	10%	6.3%	n/a	13%
Temporary Accommodation					
Roofless applicants accommodated immediately if presenting out of hours	SG	100%	99%	100%	100%
All applicants requiring temporary accommodation provided with it	SG	87%	77%	100%	87%

¹ Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

² Scottish Government

³ Scottish Housing Regulator Improvement Plan

⁴ Statutory Performance Indicator

Breaches of unsuitable accommodation order	SG	5	0	0	1
Permanent Accommodation					
90 days to first offer	CNES	22%	14%	25%	13%
Second offer within 90 days of first offer	CNES	-	0%	90%	12.5%
%age of priority need households housed	SPI	44%	58%	n/a	64%
Tenancy Sustainment for over 12 months	CNES	98%	96.5	100%	100%
Appeals					
Appeal heard within 14 working days of receipt of appeal	CNES	100%	-	100%	-
Applicant informed of decision within 3 working days of appeal	CNES	100%	-	100%	-
Complaints					
Complainant advised of outcome within 21 days of receipt of complaint	CNES	100%	-	100%	-

WESTERN ISLES FOYER

- 15.1 The Comhairle has continued to work closely with the Western Isles Foyer during the year. The Foyer provides a range of support services to young people aged between 16-25 who are homeless or in housing need. This includes providing supported accommodation, guidance and support, and training opportunities. The Foyer's work can be broken down into three main activities.
- 15.2 Lifeshaper is a programme run by Foyer in partnership with Lews Castle College aimed at enhancing a young persons independent living skills. It aims to provide structure and routine while promoting a balanced healthy lifestyle. The Lifeshaper programme also gives the opportunity to gain vocational qualifications.
- 15.3 The Homeless Resource Centre provides a central 'hub' to give young people advice and information on housing issues. This is on an informal drop-in basis, but does have the option of ongoing support if required.
- 15.4 The Foyer provides accommodation for young people in 12 self-contained flats. An out-reach service is also provided for young people living in temporary accommodation. This provides advice on tenancy matters, tenancy preparation and rent budgeting.
- 15.5 The Foyer has experienced a challenging year in terms of its funding and cashflow. It has recently carried out a staff restructuring resulting in a number of redundancies and has had to restructure its finances. The Comhairle is working closely with the Foyer Management Board to provide support and advice where possible and is monitoring the situation closely. A concurrent Report to this series of Comhairle meetings provides further information on this matter.

SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

- 16.1 The Director of Development has undertaken to carry out a review of the Homeless Service in anticipation of the completion of the new Shared Temporary Accommodation project. This review will examine the use and supply of the current temporary accommodation (including The Old House) as well as looking at a

reconfiguration of the overall Service. It is anticipated that this review will report to the November 2013 series of Comhairle meetings.

CONCLUSION

- 17.1 Homeless applications to the Comhairle continue to decrease and this encouraging trend should continue as the housing options approach prevents homelessness where possible. Ongoing staff training and adequate IT systems are integral to the success of this. The phasing out of priority need may lead to further increases in presentations thus reversing the downward trend to some degree but, to date, there has been no noticeable increase since implementation.
- 17.2 The backlog of homeless households awaiting an offer of permanent accommodation has increased as a direct result of the phasing out of priority need since 31 December 2012. The length of time for homeless households to be provided with permanent accommodation has also increased, however, the average lengths of stay in temporary accommodation have reduced slightly. It is expected that the pressure on the general waiting list, an increase in the length of time to a first offer and therefore an increase in the lengths of stay in temporary accommodation will continue as legislative changes impact, although housing options and preventative work should ease the overall impact. The Comhairle's shared temporary accommodation unit will greatly reduce the pressure on temporary accommodation once it is operational.
- 17.3 The Homeless Support Service has been assessed as 'excellent' in its quality of care and support, and 'excellent' in its quality of staffing. Forthcoming housing support regulations will further increase the pressures on the Homeless Support Service.
- 17.4 If the Comhairle is to continue to meet its statutory duties and provide a good service to homeless people, the Homelessness Service budgets continue to be a vital resource.