

ENVIRONMENT AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES COMMITTEE: 23 SEPTEMBER 2014

HOMELESSNESS ANNUAL REPORT 2013/14

Report by Director of Development

PURPOSE OF REPORT To provide the Comhairle with an update of homelessness issues covering the year 2013/14.

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 2013 – 31 March 2014, a total of 157 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 36 households were assisted under the housing options approach. Of these 36, 16 households went on to make a homeless presentation.
- 2.2 Of all homeless applications made to the Comhairle in 2013-2014, 130 were made to Lewis (4 of which were from Harris), 24 to Uist and 3 to Barra.
- 2.3 The Comhairle accepted a duty to permanently accommodate 98 households in this period and discharged its duty to 67 households by providing them with permanent accommodation.

RECOMMENDATION

3.1 It is recommended that the Comhairle note the content of this Report

Contact Officer: Lorraine Graham Tel. 01851-707909

Appendices: None

Background Papers: None

HOMELESS APPLICATIONS

- 4.1 During the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014, 157 homelessness applications were made to the Comhairle consisting of 180 adults and 64 children, as shown in Chart 1. This is a 6% decrease on last year's figure of 167 and reflects the national trend shown in Chart 2.
- 4.2 In 2013 to 2014, homelessness figures in Scotland fell by 8%. This on-going 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 36 households were assisted through the housing options approach with 16 of these households going on to make a homeless presentation. If the remaining 20 households had been interviewed as a homeless interview then the figure of homeless presentations for 2013 to 2014 would have been 177 households.
- 4.4 The housing options approach is therefore reducing overall levels of homelessness presentations.

Chart 1 - Homeless Applications in the Western Isles 2004-2014

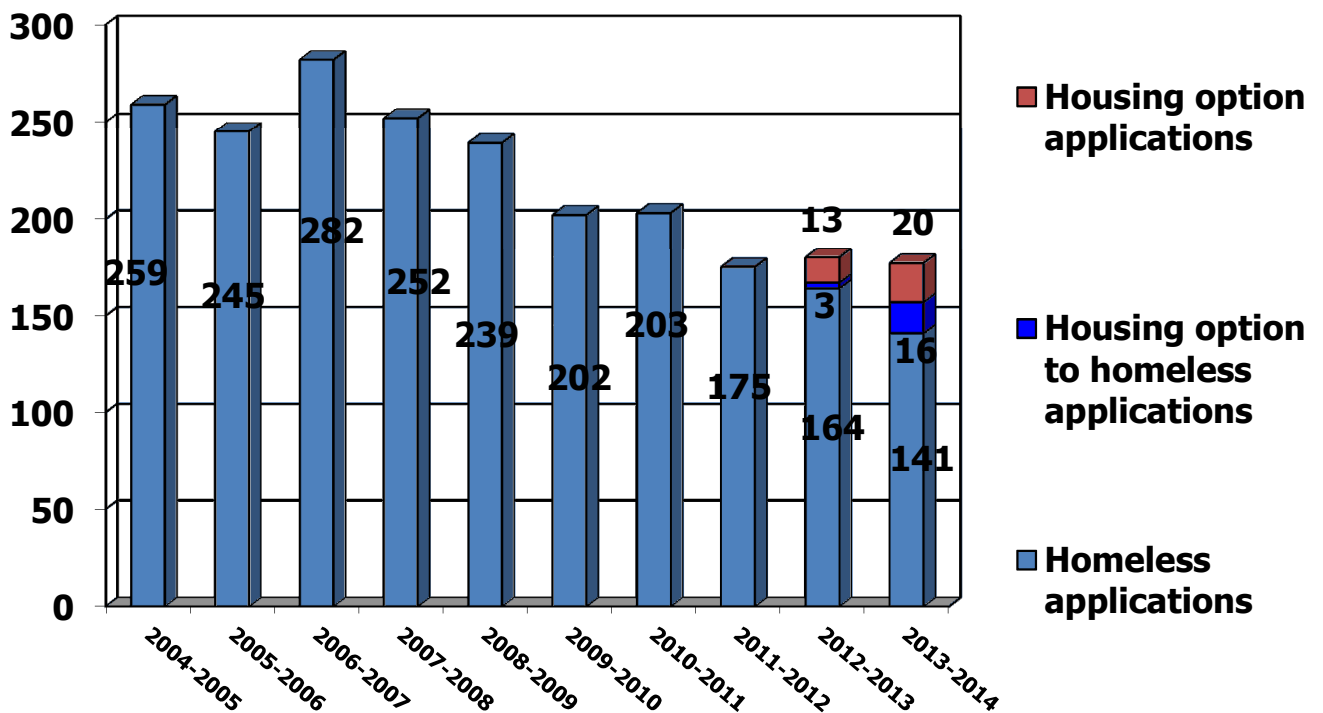
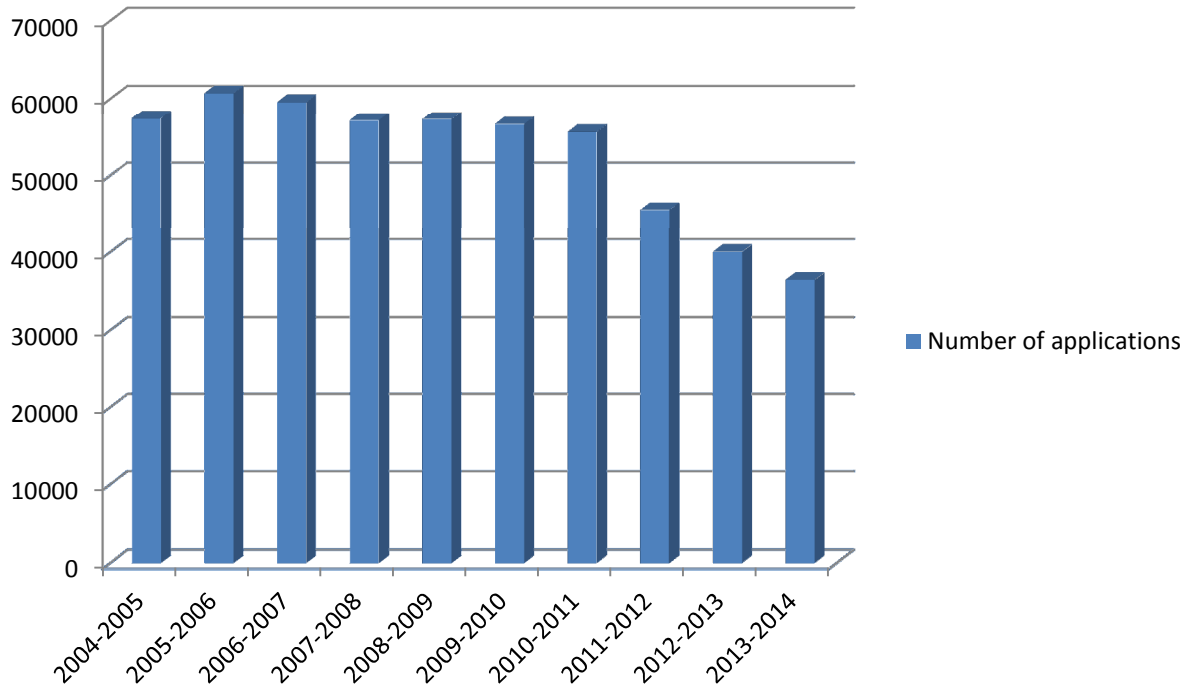


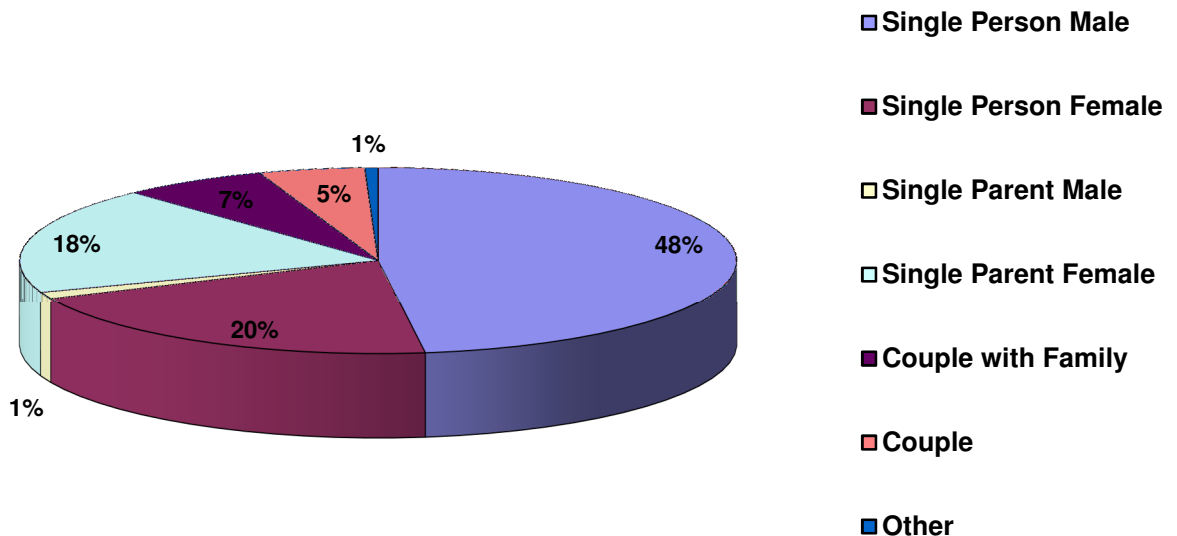
Chart 2 - Homeless Applications in Scotland 2004-2014



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 83% of presentations were from Lewis, 2.5% from Harris, 15% from Uist and 2% from Barra.

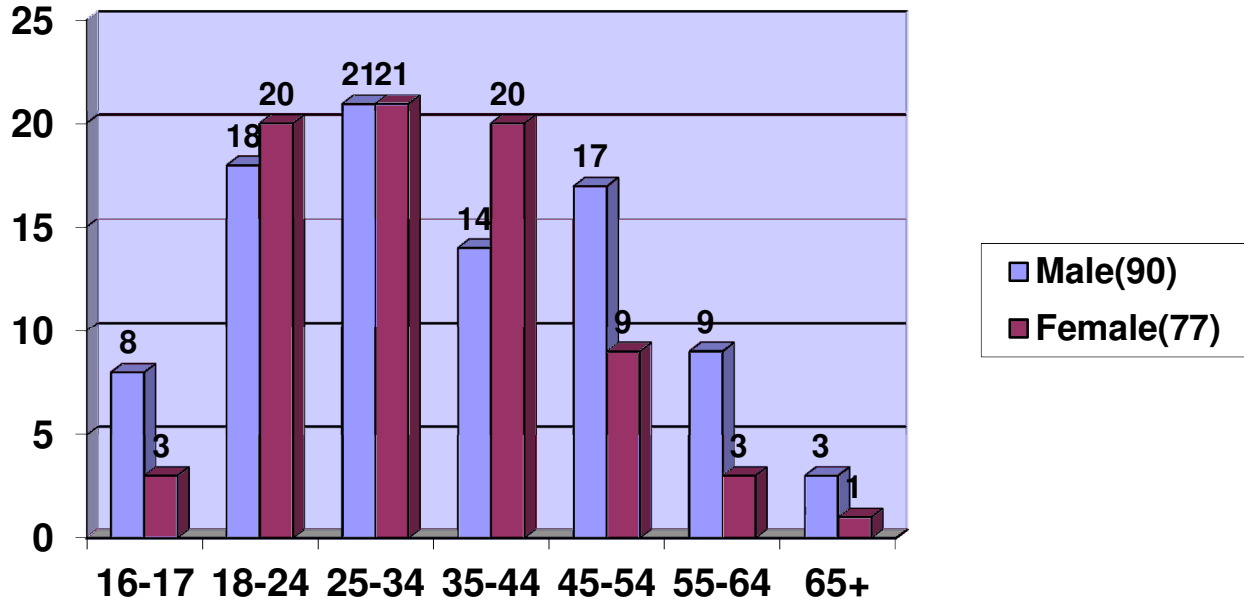
4.6 Household types presenting in the Western Isles generally remain consistent proportionately locally and nationally. The main household type presenting continues to be single people with 48% of applications being made by single men and 20% by single women.

Chart 3 – Homeless Applications in the Western Isles in 2013-2014 by Household Type



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

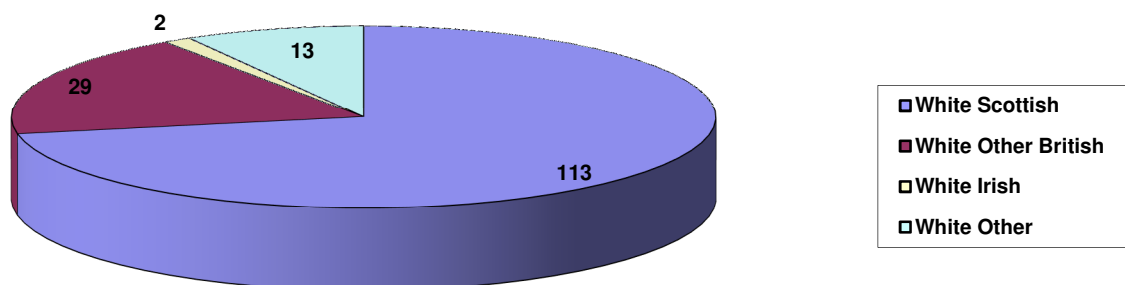
Chart 4 – Homeless Age Groups by Gender 2013-2014



4.8 In all homeless applications made in the Western Isles in 2013/2014 the main applicant was recorded as White. 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.

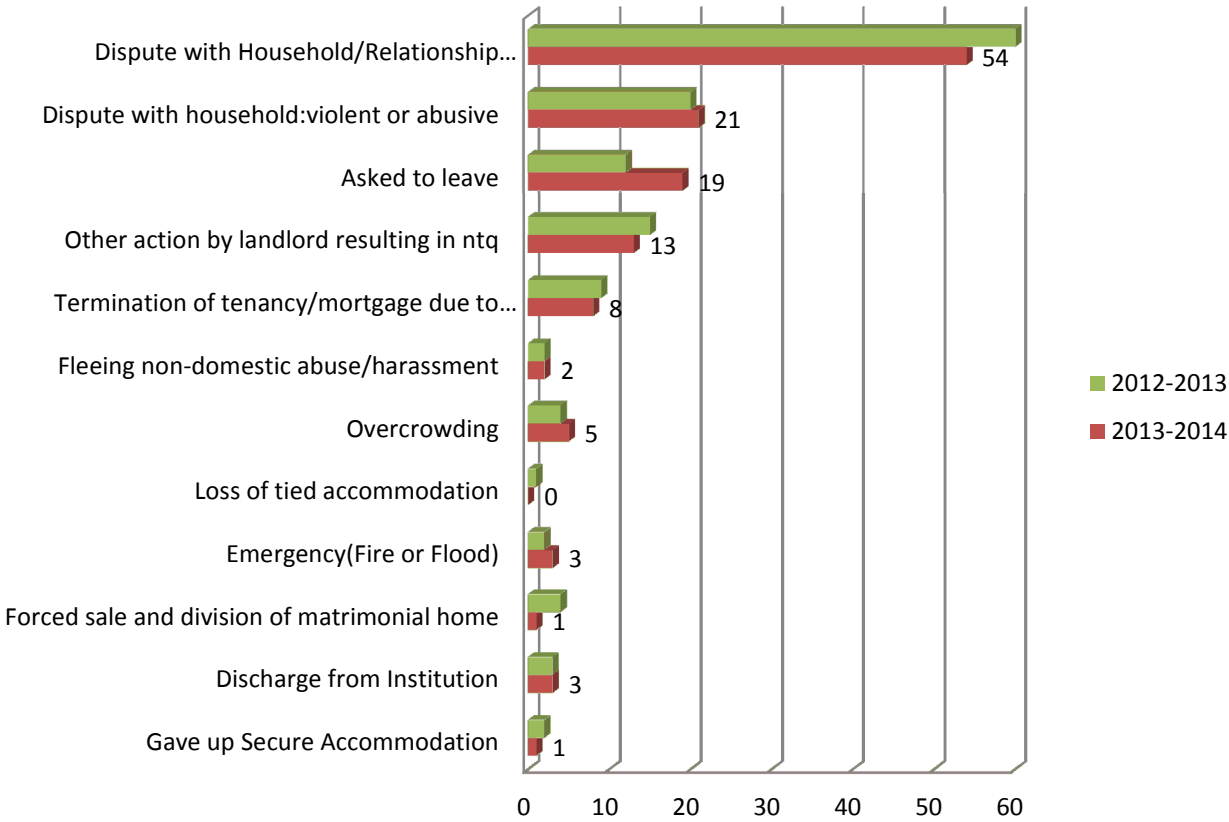
4.9 No applicants described themselves as a gypsy/traveller. A further two applicants stated that they had a physical disability. One household had served in the armed forces less than 5 years ago. Seven households stated that they had been looked after by the local authority less than 5 years before the date of applying, and one had been looked after more than 5 years ago.

Chart 5 – Homeless Applications in the Western Isles by Ethnic Origin 2013-2014



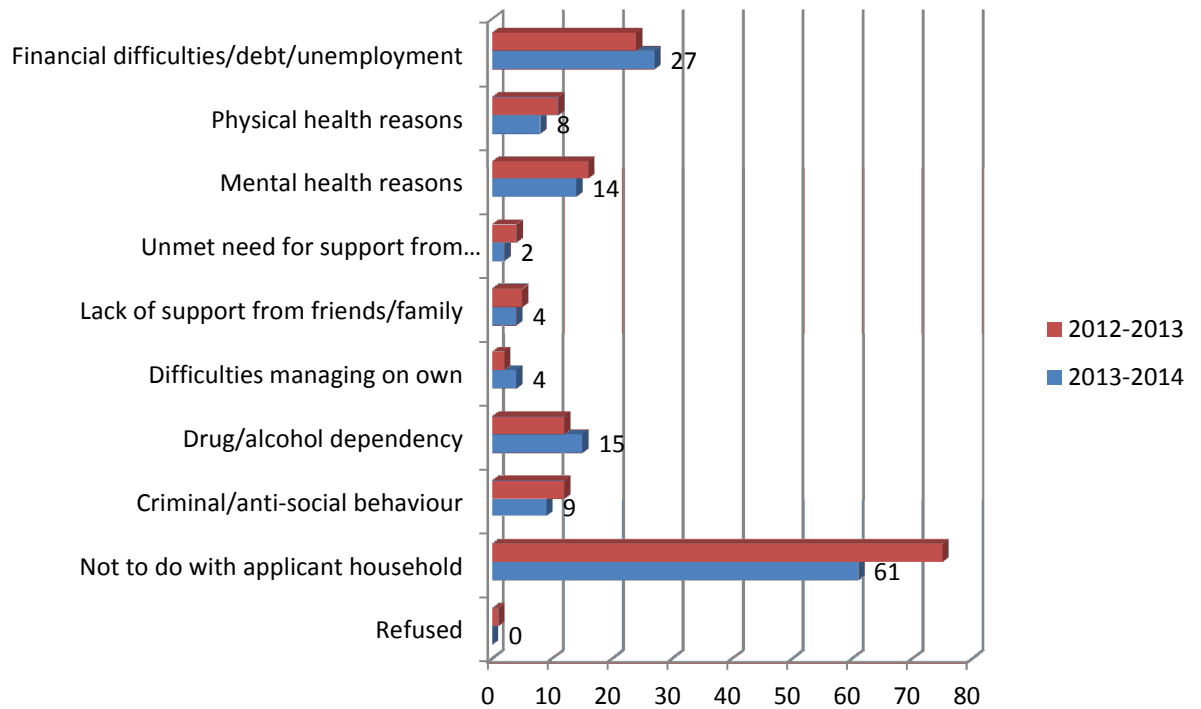
4.9 The main reason given for presenting as homeless continues to be a dispute within the household with 48% of applicants citing this as the reason for homelessness in 2012-2013. Of those who presented for this reason, 28% stated that there was abuse in the relationship. These figures are higher than for the previous year. Throughout Scotland as a whole in 2013-2014, 27% 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 2012-2013 and 2013-2014



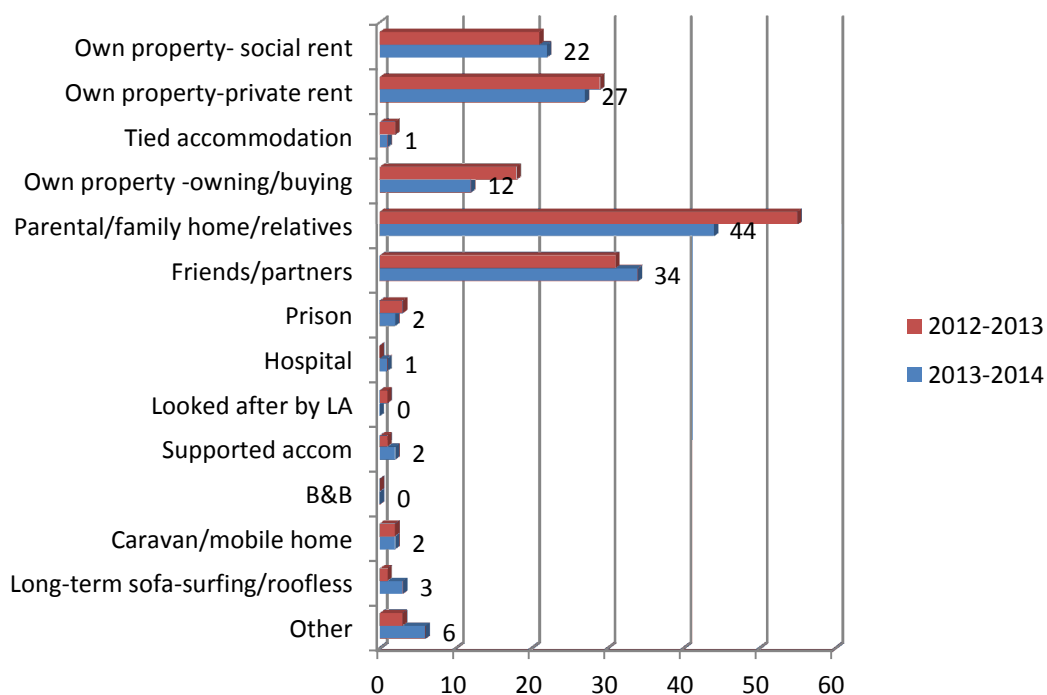
4.10 Underlying reasons for failing to maintain the household's existing accommodation are also investigated. Of all households who gave underlying reasons, the main contributory factor given was financial difficulties/debt/unemployment with 17% of applicants identifying this as an underlying cause, an increase from the 14% of applicants in the preceding year. The actual number of households presenting as a result of rent arrears or mortgage default has stayed consistent at 5%.

Chart 7 – Underlying reasons for failing to maintain accommodation in the Western Isles 2012-2013 and 2013-2014



4.11 Of the 167 households who applied in 2012-2013, 44 (28%) had been living with friends and relatives while 62 (39%) 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 2012-2013 and 2013-2014



HOMELESS ASSESSMENTS

- 5.1 Numbers of cases with whom contact is lost or the application is withdrawn has decreased slightly to 7%. In the year 2013/14, 24 households resolved their homelessness prior to an assessment being made, often due to a relationship breakdown being resolved. Of the remaining 109 households assessed as homeless or potentially homeless, 10% were assessed as intentionally homeless. Only one household was assessed as neither homeless nor threatened with homelessness.

Table 1 – Assessments of homeless applications 2011-2014

	2011-2012		2012-2013		2013-2014	
	CNES	Scotland	CNES	Scotland	CNES	Scotland
Priority homeless	54%	70%	62%	76%	75.5%	80%
Non-priority homeless	21%	7%	9%	3%	n/a	n/a
Assessed as not homeless	3%	7%	6%	5%	0.5%	5%
Lost contact, withdrew etc.	19%	16%	23%	15%	24%	14%
All assessments	173	45,995	167	40,032	145	36,359

- 5.3 In the period 2013/14, one household was assessed as having an unintentional priority need with no local connection. This household spent some time in temporary accommodation before returning to their previous accommodation.

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 50 operational homeless temporary accommodation units throughout the Western Isles. The Comhairle provides 17 of these from its own stock, leases a further 30 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 32 households with Bed and Breakfast accommodation. Pressure on this type of accommodation will reduce significantly when The Acres is fully operational. The Comhairle will continue to work with the Hebridean Housing Partnership 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.

- 7.2 In 2013/14, the Comhairle accommodated 42 homeless households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation with an average length of stay of 24 weeks, a 14% increase on the length of stay for 2012/13. 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 32 households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation, 6 of whom have been there for over a year.
- 7.3 The Comhairle had no breaches of the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order in 2013-2014.
- 7.4 The Comhairle recorded a further 49 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 39 weeks, a 15% increase 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 2009-2014

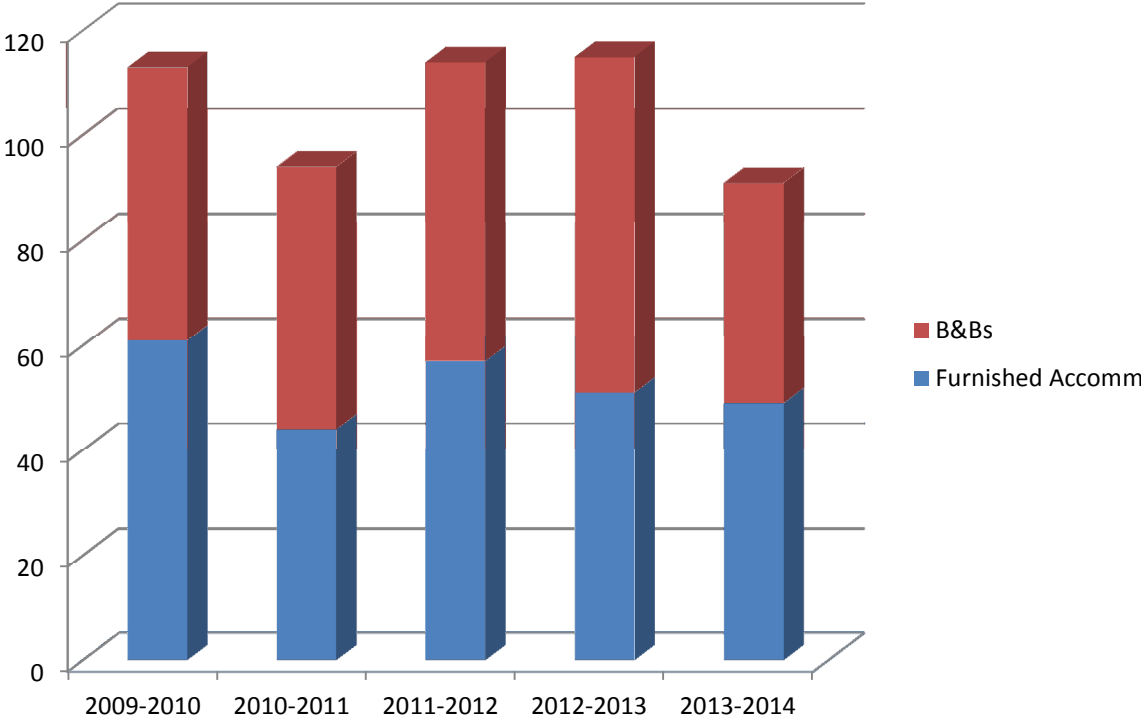
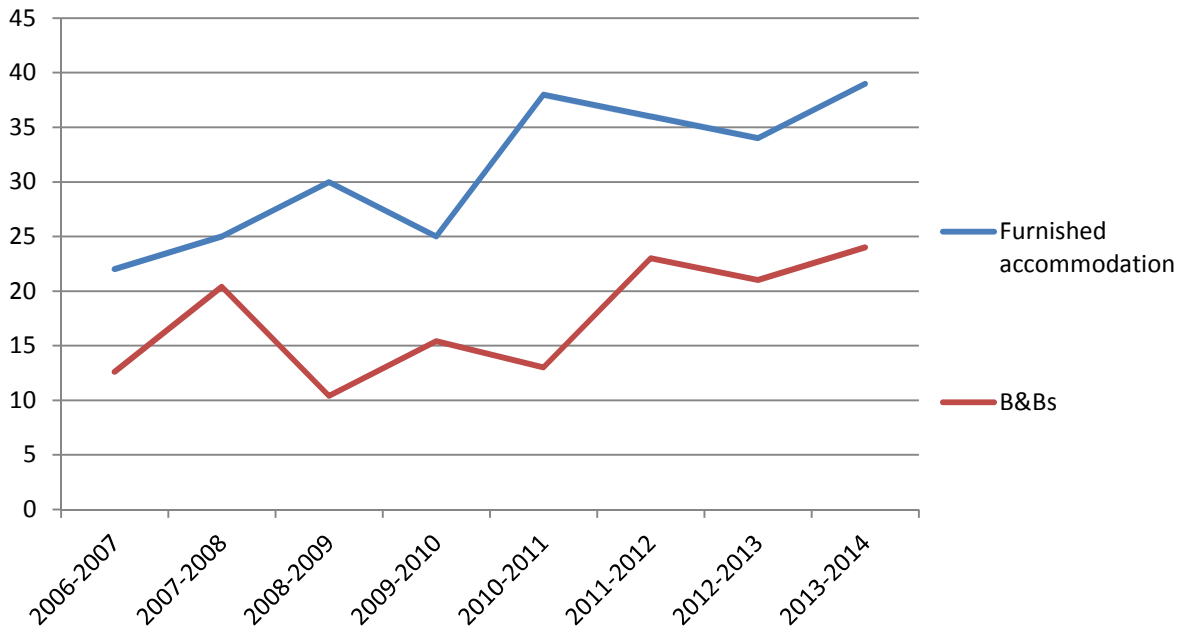


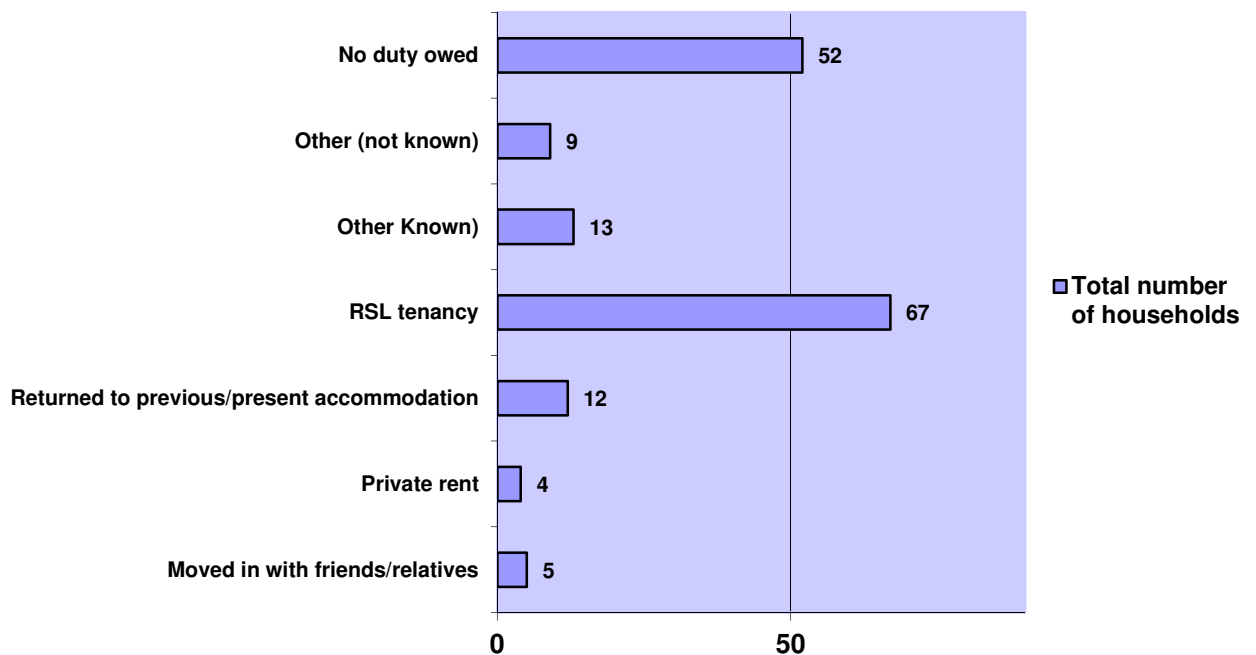
Chart 11 – Lengths of stay in temporary accommodation in the Western Isles for closed cases 2006-2014 (weeks)



PERMANENT ACCOMMODATION

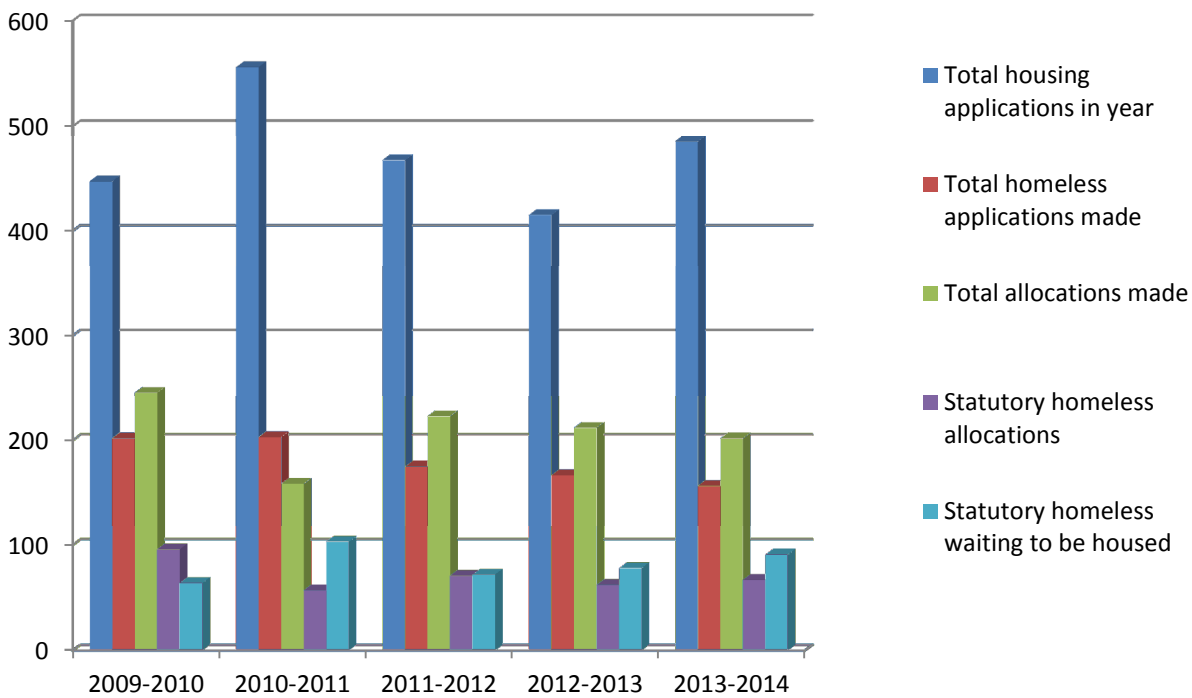
8.1 At the date of writing this Report, 91 priority homeless households were waiting an offer of permanent housing in order for the Comhairle’s duty to them to be fully discharged. This is a 17% increase in the numbers waiting compared to the same date in 2013/14. In the period 2013/14, 67 homeless households were provided with a permanent tenancy under homelessness legislation. This figure represents 33% of all allocations made in the Western Isles, an increase on the 29% of all allocations made in the preceding year. Chart 12 shows the housing outcomes for homeless households whose cases were closed in the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014.

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



- 8.2 Stornoway continues to be the most pressurised area. Of all social housing allocations made in 2013/14 in Stornoway, 41% were to statutory homeless household. HHP aims to allocate 50% of properties in Stornoway to homeless households.
- 8.4 The average length of time taken to make a first offer of permanent housing to priority homeless households was 307 days in 2013/14, a 1% increase on the time taken in 2012/13. It took an average of 325 days for all priority homeless households to be housed as 9 households waited for a second offer, a 2% increase on the preceding year. The continuing increase in the 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. 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 decision. In 2013/14, 13% of first offers were made within 3 months. 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. Chart 13 below illustrates the pressures on waiting lists.

Chart 13 – Housing and homelessness trends 2009-2014



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 sorted and the household is settled. In 2013/14 there were 32 referrals made to this service, 15 for Lewis and Harris and 17 for Uist and Barra. Future annual reports will report in more detail on outcomes for households supported under the new Housing Support Duty.
- 9.2 The Care Inspectorate recently inspected the Homeless Support Service and has again 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 consistently being provided to homeless households.

- 9.3 Tenancy sustainment levels continue to be high with 97% of homeless applicants housed permanently under homelessness legislation in 2012/2013 sustaining their tenancy for more than one year, although it should be recognised that some tenancies did end, but the termination was planned and not considered as a failed tenancy. For all households housed by HHP in 2012-2013, 89% 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.
- 9.4 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. Contributions of second hand furniture have reduced this year and options to develop this service will be explored, although lack of suitable storage space is an ongoing constraint.
- 9.5 Rent deposits can 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.

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.

Table 3 – Support needs as identified by household when making homeless application 2013-2014

Support Need	Number of applicants
Mental health	30
Learning disability	4
Physical disability	6
Medical condition	20
Drug or alcohol dependency	22
Basic housing management/independent living skills	12

- 10.3 The Comhairle's Homelessness Task Force and the Youth Homelessness Forum meet to develop and monitor the respective action plans.
- 10.4 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 2013 to 31 March 2014, 154 NHS vouchers were distributed, 45% less than in the preceding year. A further 36 food vouchers were issued for the Trussell Trust Food Bank operated by the New Wine Church.

REVIEWS AND COMPLAINTS

- 11.1 The Comhairle received no appeals against homelessness determinations made in 2013/14, and no appeals against offers of permanent accommodation.
- 11.2 There were no formal complaints made about the Homelessness Service in 2013/14.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

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

Chart 14 - Initial Interview satisfaction ratings 2013-2014 (1=very satisfied, 5=very dissatisfied) (8 returns)

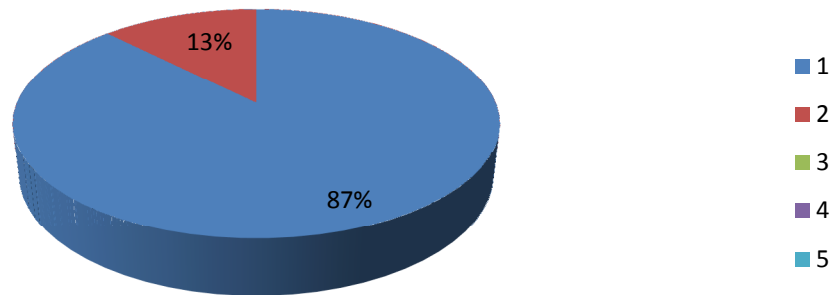


Chart 15 - Temporary Accommodation satisfaction ratings 2013-2014 (1= very satisfied, 5 = very dissatisfied) (5 returns)

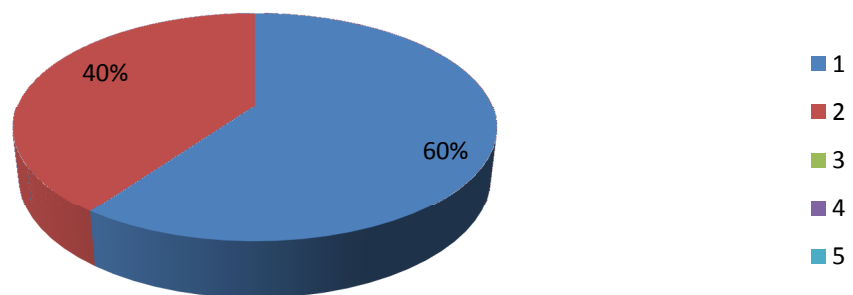
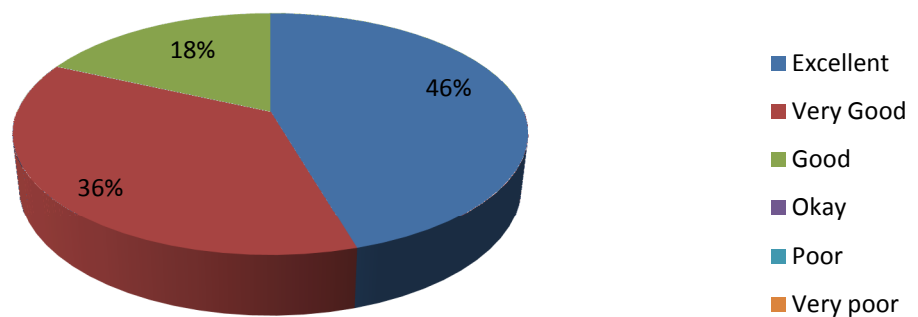


Chart 16 - Exit Questionnaire overall satisfaction ratings 2013-2014 (11 returns)



13.1 The Comhairle has now rationalised all standards and targets into one framework as illustrated in the table below.

Table 4 - Homelessness Performance Management Framework

Standard	Type	Actual 2011-2012	Actual 2012-2013	Target 2013-2014	Actual 2013-2014
Initial Interview					
Interview applicants within 1 working day (unless applicant specifies otherwise)	CNES ¹	97%	96%	90%	96%
Determinations					
Applicants to be advised of homelessness decision within 28 days of interview	SG ² /SHRIP ₃	77%	79%	80%	74%
Numbers of homeless applicants being assessed as priority need	SG	70.4%	87.5%	n/a	n/a
Reduction in number of Lost Contacts	SHRIP	7%	4%	10%	5%
%age of priority need cases reassessed within 12 months of completion of duty	SPI ⁴	1.2%	9%	n/a	6%
%age of non priority need cases reassessed within 12 months of completion of duty	SPI	6.3%	13%	n/a	n/a
Temporary Accommodation					
Roofless applicants accommodated immediately if presenting out of hours	SG	99%	100%	100%	100%
All applicants requiring temporary accommodation provided with it	SG	77%	87%	100%	98%
Breaches of unsuitable accommodation order	SG	0	1	0	0
Permanent Accommodation					
90 days to first offer	CNES	14%	13%	25%	13%
Second offer within 90 days of first offer	CNES	0%	12.5%	90%	
%age of priority need households housed	SPI	58%	64%	n/a	68%
Tenancy Sustainment for over 12 months	CNES	96.5	100%	100%	97%
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%	-

¹ Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

² Scottish Government

³ Scottish Housing Regulator Improvement Plan

⁴ Statutory Performance Indicator

SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

- 14.1 The Homelessness Service and the Director of Education and Children's Services are currently exploring options for the ongoing use of 'The Old House' with a view to providing accommodation, with support, for homeless young people. Any proposals would be the subject of future Reports to the relevant Comhairle Committees.

CONCLUSION

- 15.1 Homeless applications to the Comhairle continue to decrease and this encouraging trend should continue as the housing options approach prevents homelessness where possible. However, it is worth noting that 7 out of Scotland's 32 local authorities experienced an increase in homelessness in 2013 to 2014. Ongoing staff training and adequate IT systems are integral to the success of housing options.
- 15.2 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 2013. The length of time for homeless households to be provided with permanent accommodation has also increased as have the average lengths of stay in temporary accommodation. 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 Acres will greatly reduce the pressure on temporary accommodation.
- 15.3 If the Comhairle is to continue to meet its statutory duties and provide an appropriate service to homeless people, the Homelessness Service budget continues to be the vital resource.