



**HOUSING OPTIONS AND HOMELESSNESS ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25**

Report by Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration

**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to provide the Comhairle with an update of housing options and homelessness issues covering the year 2024/25.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 In the period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025, a total of 139 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. Seven households were assisted under the housing options approach. Of these, four households went on to make a homeless presentation.
- 2.3 Of all homeless applications made to the Comhairle in 2024-2025, 115 were made to the Stornoway office (eight of which were from Harris), with a further 20 applications from Uist and four from Barra.
- 2.4 The Comhairle accepted a duty to permanently accommodate 109 households in this period and discharged its duty to 89 households by providing them with permanent accommodation.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

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Appendix: None

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

## IMPLICATIONS

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

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	The Comhairle has received £331,000 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	As 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

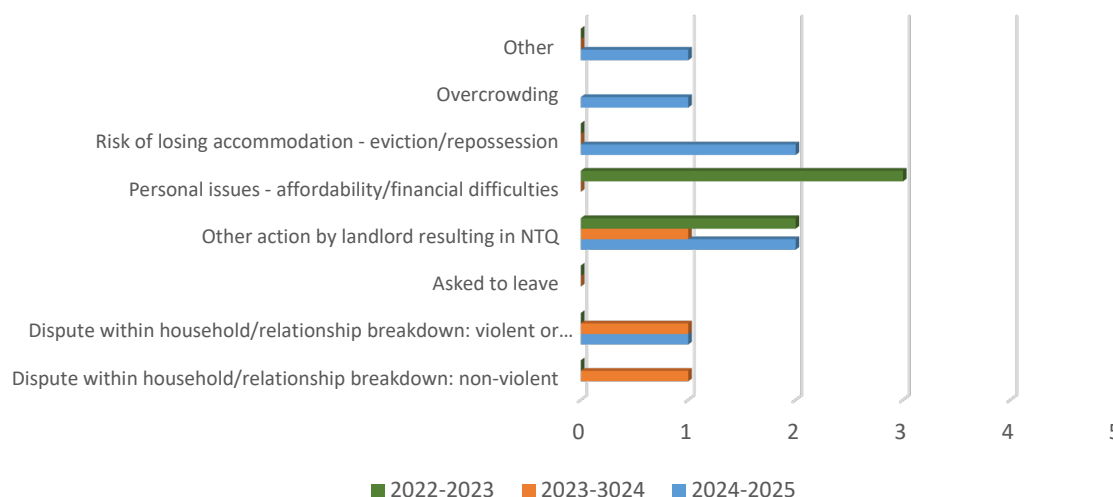
## BACKGROUND

5.1 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. The report provides the Comhairle with an update of housing options and homelessness issues covering the year 2024/25.

## HOUSING OPTIONS APPLICATIONS AND OUTCOMES

- 6.1 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 2024 to 31 March 2025, seven 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.
- 6.2 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. The main reasons given were a landlord serving notice for reasons other than rent arrears or antisocial behaviour, and the risk of losing a home through eviction or repossession.

**Chart 1 – Reasons given for Housing Options Applications in the Western Isles 2022/23-2024/25**



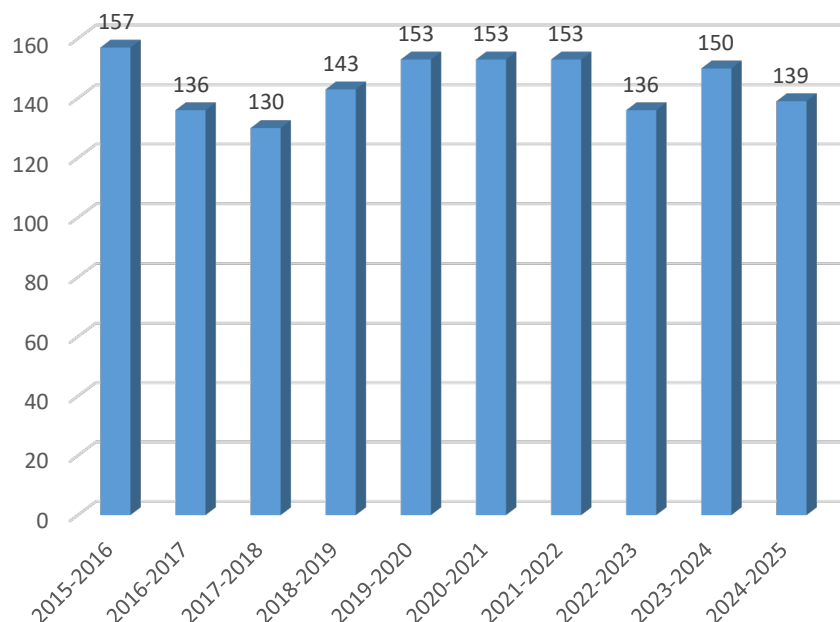
6.3 Housing Options applicants are provided with advice and assistance to try and assist them to remain in their present accommodation, if safe to do so, or find alternative accommodation before the applicant actually becomes homeless. This may include general housing advice, the provision of aids and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

6.4 Eight Housing Options applications were closed during 2024-2025. Two resolved their housing issues and remained in their accommodation, one applicant found private rent, one moved in with relatives, and four went on to make a homelessness application to the Comhairle.

#### **HOMELESSNESS APPLICATIONS**

7.1 During the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, 139 homelessness applications were made to the Comhairle consisting of 156 adults and 45 children. This is a 7% decrease on last year's figure of 150. Unfortunately, it is not possible to make any national comparisons at the date of writing this report as the release of Scotland's homelessness statistics for 2024-2025 has been delayed. However, the mid-year national statistics showed a 1% increase in homelessness applications between April and September 2024. Following five local authorities declaring a housing emergency, the Scottish Government declared a national housing emergency in May 2024. This was partially driven by pressures on homelessness services, including regular breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order. It has not been necessary for the Comhairle to declare a housing emergency.

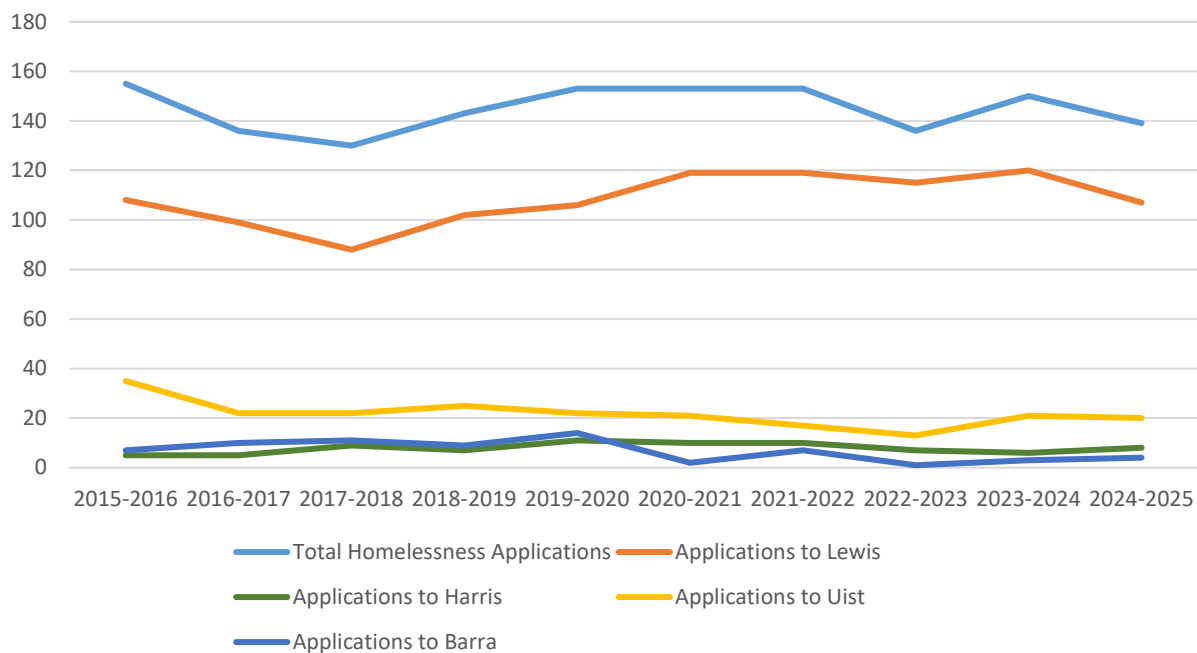
**Chart 2 – Homeless Applications in the Outer Hebrides 2015/16-2024/25**



7.2 The majority of homelessness applications are made to the Stornoway Office which covers Lewis and Harris. Over this period, 77% of presentations were from Lewis, 6% from Harris, 14% from Uist and 3% from Barra.

7.3 The decrease in overall numbers can be largely attributed to a decrease across Lewis as illustrated below. Numbers in Harris and Barra rose slightly.

**Chart 3 – Homeless Presentations by Area 2015/16-2024/25**

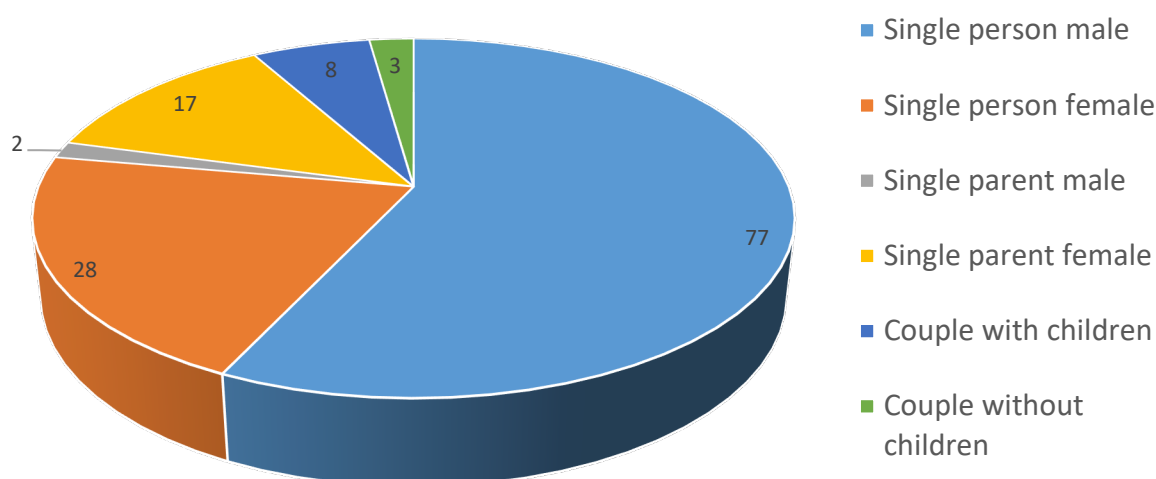


**Table 1 – Proportion of homeless presentations to total households in the Outer Hebrides by area 2024/25**

	Lewis	Harris	Uist	Barra
Total number of households by area <sup>1</sup>	9,220	935	2,320	609
Total number of households presenting as homeless	107	8	20	4
Proportion of homeless applicants to all homeless households	77%	6%	14%	3%
Proportion of homeless households to all households by area	1.16%	0.86%	0.86%	0.66%

- 7.4 Of all applications to the Comhairle, 3.7% 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.
- 7.5 Household types presenting in the Outer Hebrides generally remain consistent proportionately locally. The main household type presenting continues to be single people with 55% of applications being made by single men and 20% by single women.

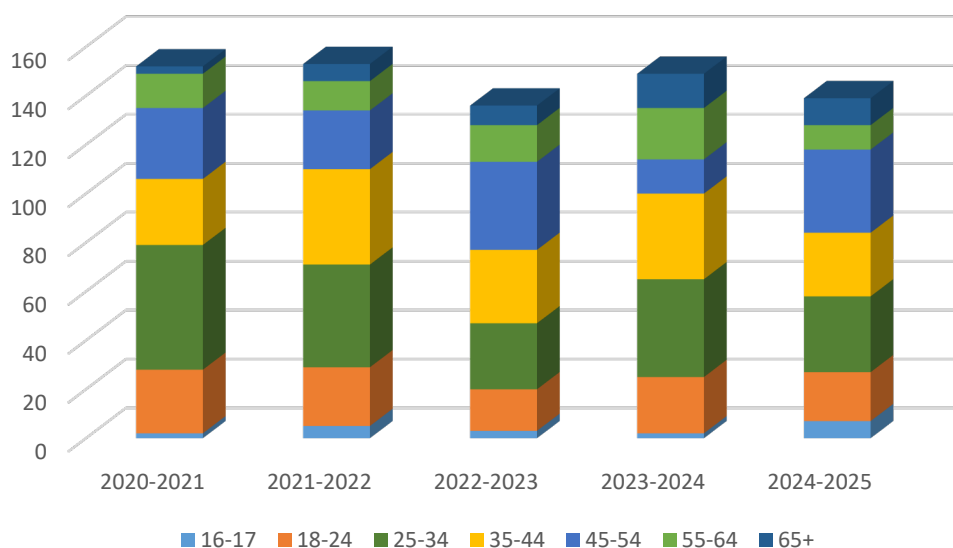
**Chart 5 – Homeless Applications in the Outer Hebrides in 2024-2025 by Household Type**



<sup>1</sup> NRS (2025) Households and Dwellings in Scotland, 2024

7.6 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 number of young people (aged 16-24) presenting has increased slightly, with the number aged 16-17 presenting (seven young people) being at the highest level since 2015-2016.

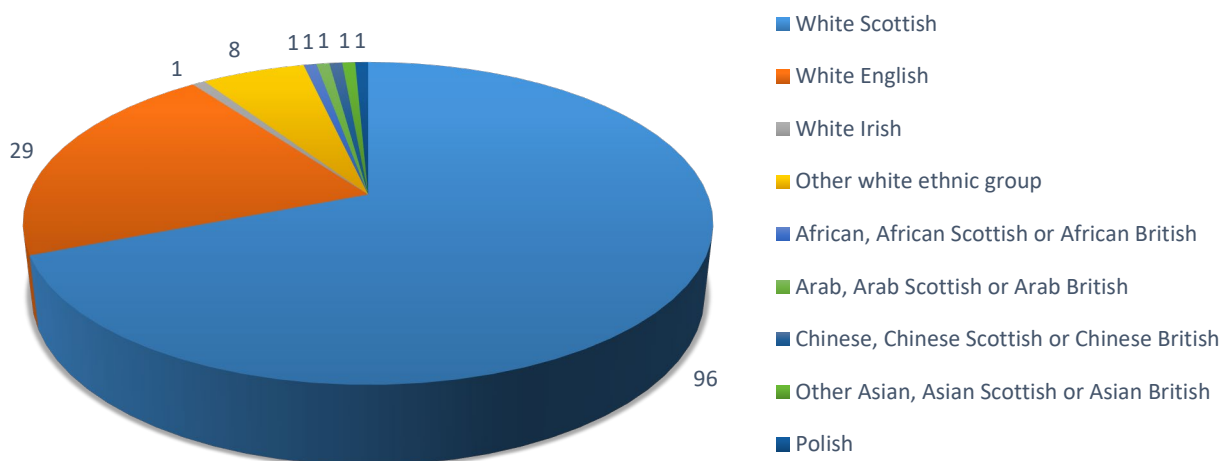
**Chart 6 – Homeless Age Groups 2020/21-2024/25**



7.7 The Comhairle also records the number of care leavers presenting as homeless. In the year 2024-2025, three young people had been formerly looked after by the Comhairle in the past five years. A further two young people aged under 25 had been formerly looked after five or more years ago.

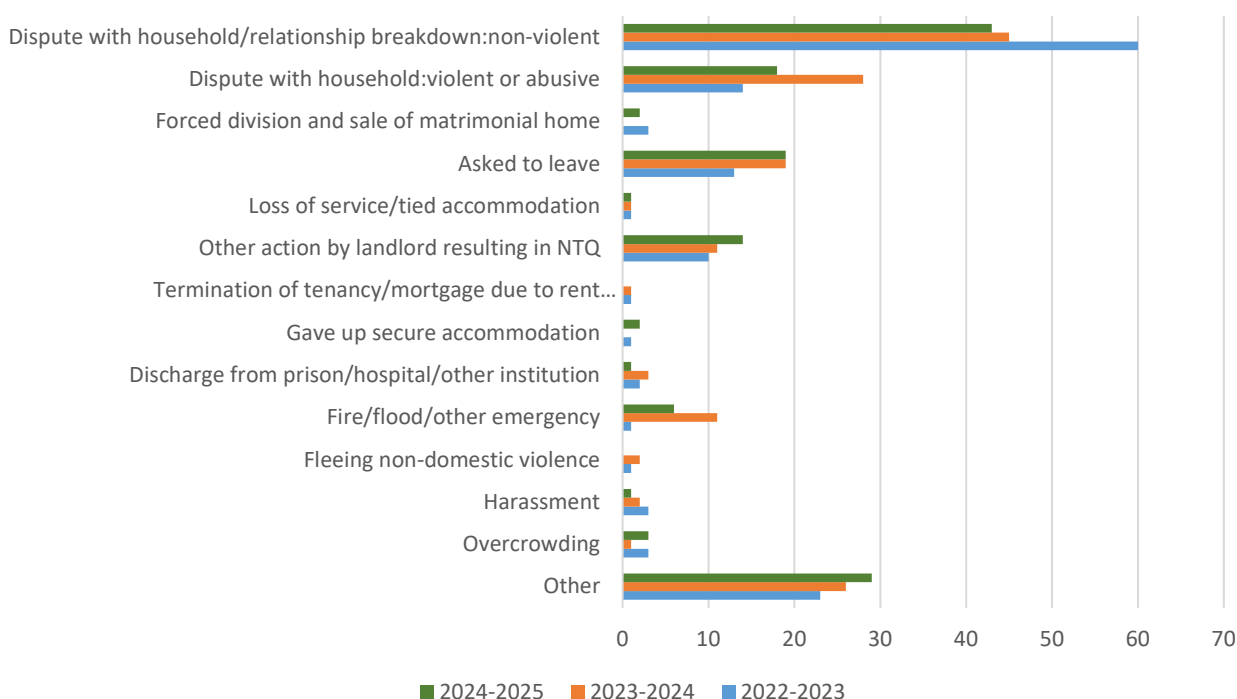
7.8 The ethnic origin of homeless applicants in the Outer Hebrides for 2024-2025 is shown at Chart 7 below. No applicants described themselves as a gypsy/traveller. Fifteen applicants stated that they had a physical disability. It continues to be very difficult to make any detailed analysis of outcomes 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 2024-2025**



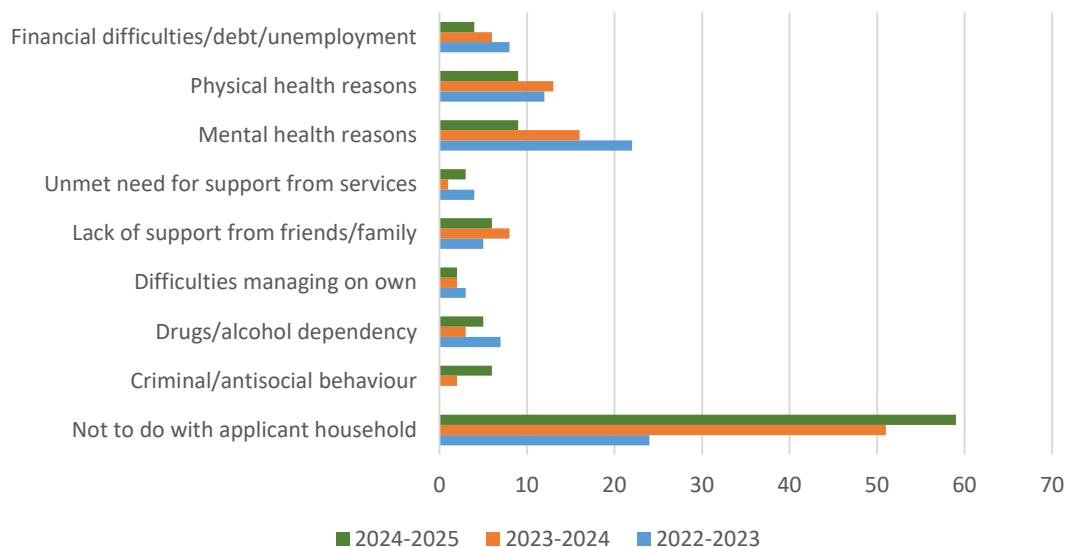
- 7.9 Two applicants stated that they had previously been a member of the armed services, all having served over five years ago.
- 7.10 Eleven applicants stated that they had slept rough in the three months prior to making a homeless application, with two of these saying that they had slept rough on 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.
- 7.11 The main reason given for presenting as homeless in the Outer Hebrides, as shown below, is a dispute within the household, with 44% of applicants citing this as the reason for homelessness in 2024/25. Of those who presented due to a relationship breakdown in 2024/25, 30% stated that there was abuse in the relationship.
- 7.12 The Comhairle continues to monitor the number of homelessness presentations due to their home being assessed as below tolerable standard. Five households presented for this reason in 24/25, which is a decrease from the nine in the preceding year but still worthy of ongoing monitoring.

**Chart 8 – Technical Reasons for Homelessness in the Outer Hebrides 2022/23-2024/25**



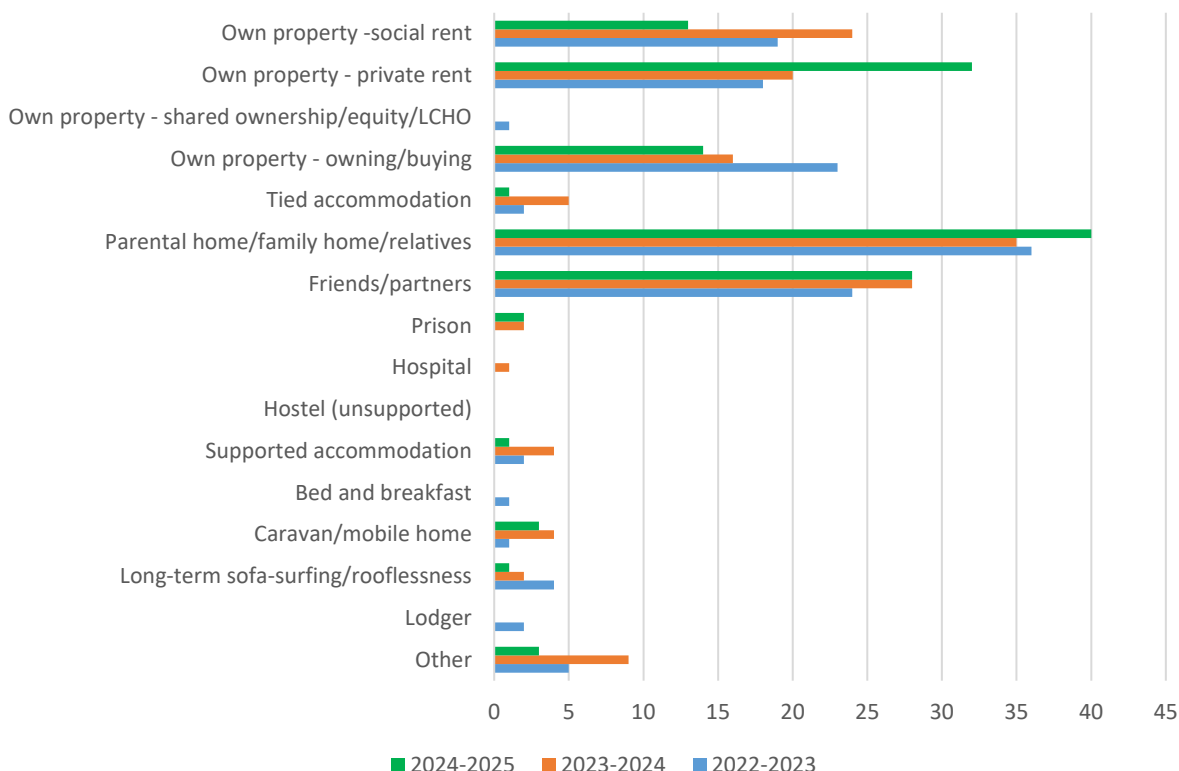
- 7.13 Underlying reasons for failing to maintain the household's existing accommodation are shown at Chart 9. Only 3% of households stated that financial difficulties, debt or unemployment was a contributing factor to their homelessness although the true figure is likely to be higher than this. The main contributory factors given to the Comhairle were mental health reasons with 6.5% of all applicants stating that this was a contributing factor to their homelessness, and a physical health reason which was cited by 6.5% of applicants. Only 3.6% 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 14.

**Chart 9: Underlying reasons for failing to maintain accommodation in the Outer Hebrides 2022/23-2024/25**



7.14 Of the 139 households who applied in 2024-2025, 68 (49%) had been living with friends or relatives while 60 (43%) had been living in their own property (i.e. which they either rented or owned) as shown at Chart 10 below. While there was a marked increase in those presenting from private rent (32 households), only 10 of those presented due to a notice to quit.

**Chart 10 – Prior housing circumstances of applicants in the Outer Hebrides 2022/23-2024/25**

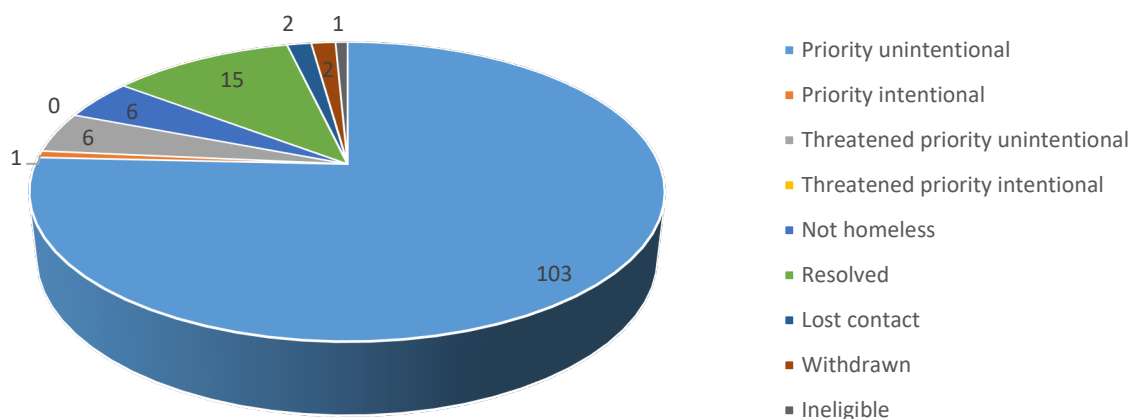




## HOMELESSNESS ASSESSMENTS

- 8.1 In the year 2024-2025, 17 households resolved their homelessness or withdrew their application prior to an assessment being made, often due to a relationship breakdown being resolved. Six households were assessed as neither homeless nor potentially homeless. Contact was lost with two households prior to an assessment decision being made. A further one household was assessed as ineligible for assistance. Of the remaining 110 households assessed as homeless or potentially homeless, 109 (99.1%) were assessed as unintentionally homeless or threatened with homelessness. Only one (0.9%) was found to be intentionally homeless.

**Chart 11– Assessment of homeless applications 2024-2025**



## LOCAL CONNECTION

- 9.1 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 have maintained regular contact with local authorities to monitor the impact of these changes, and movement between local authorities is being recorded. In 2024/25, 18 households with no local connection made a homelessness application to the Comhairle. This is an increase of 80% since 2023/24. However, eight of the 18 were from outwith Scotland. A further three households with a local connection to the Outer Hebrides presented as homeless elsewhere in Scotland. Scottish Government figures on movement between authorities are given only for guidance purposes as they are collected informally and cannot be verified.

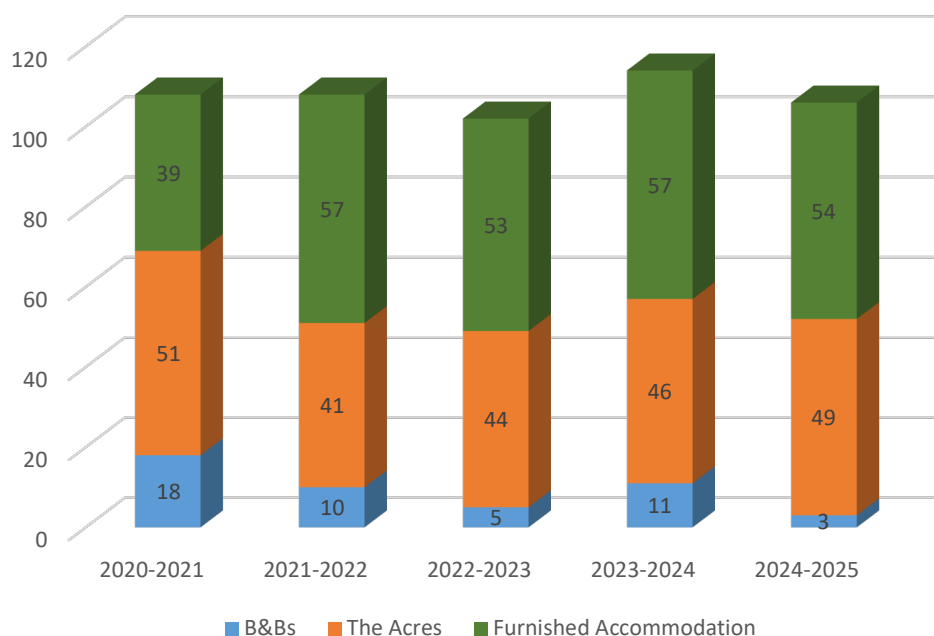
## TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

- 10.1 There are presently 65 temporary accommodation units in operation throughout the Outer Hebrides. The Comhairle leases 26 of these from HHP and owns the remaining 39, of which 24 are located in The Acres. One tenancy 'flipped' from temporary to permanent accommodation in 2024/25. Fifty-three households were being accommodated on 31 March 2025, including 13 children.
- 10.2 In 2024/25, the Comhairle accommodated three homeless households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation with an average length of stay of four days. These stays were all in Uist. The Comhairle has sustained a reduction in its use of Bed and Breakfasts for temporary accommodation and there were no breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order. The Order is breached when any

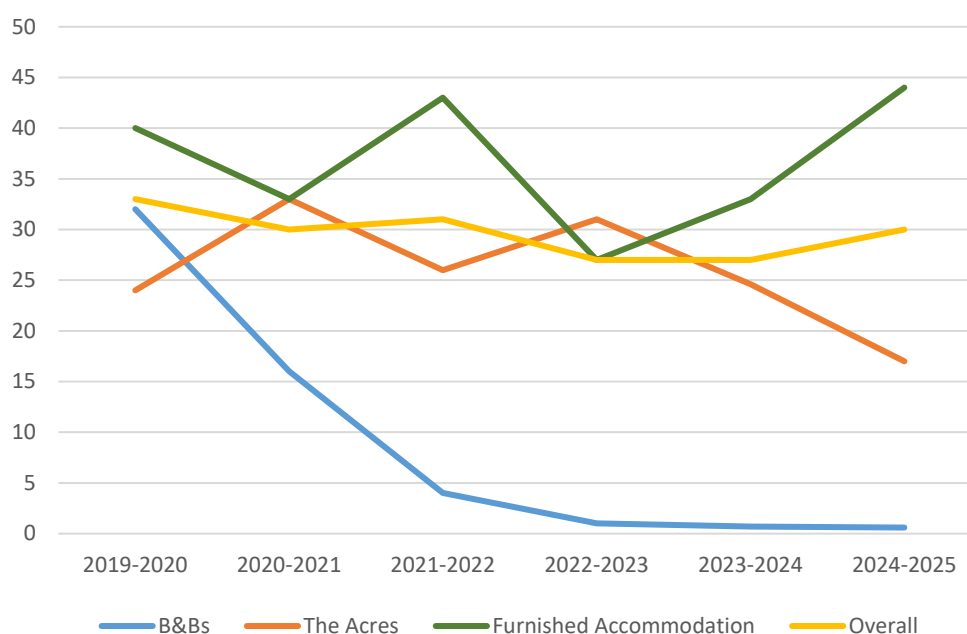
household is accommodated in what is legally classed as unsuitable accommodation for more than seven days, with a few exceptions such as being accommodated due to a fire or flood.

- 10.3 A further 103 households were provided with furnished temporary accommodation, 49 of these in The Acres. It should be noted that these figures reflect households whose cases have been closed in the year, and some households were accommodated more than once. The average length of stay in self-contained accommodation was 306 days, and 119 days for The Acres. The overall lengths of stay for households in temporary accommodation increased by 11.8% in 2024/25 from 187 days to 209 days.

**Chart 12 - Numbers of cases closed in the year provided with temporary accommodation in the Outer Hebrides 2020/21 - 2024/25**



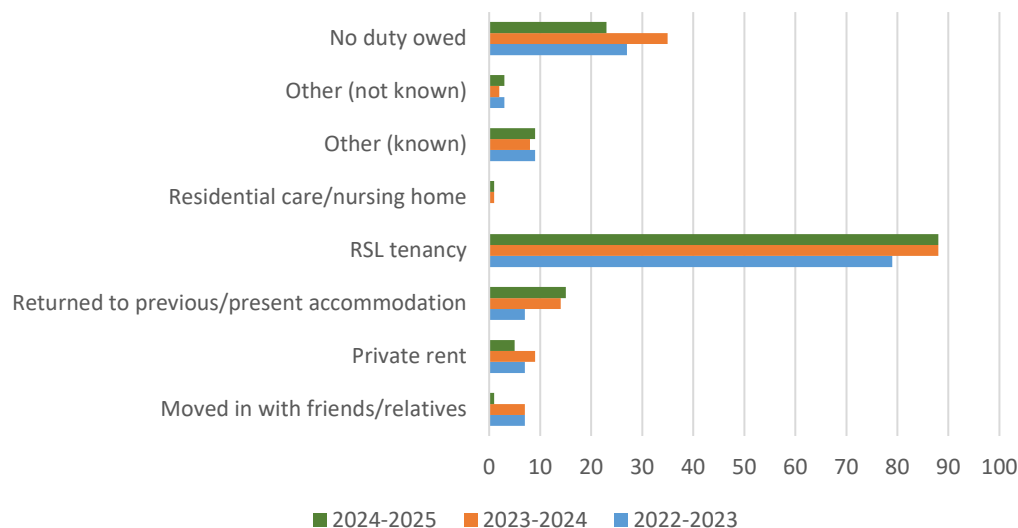
**Chart 13 - Lengths of stay in temporary accommodation in the Outer Hebrides for closed cases 2019/20-2024/25 (weeks)**



## PERMANENT ACCOMMODATION

- 11.1 At the date of writing this report, 78 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 slight increase on the 75 waiting on the same date in 2023/24. However, nine of those currently waiting have received a provisional offer. The remaining balance of 69 households is the same as that on 31 March 2025, which was the lowest backlog of those waiting a permanent offer since 2007/08.
- 11.2 In the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, 84 homeless households were provided with a permanent tenancy by HHP under homelessness legislation. This figure represents 39% of all allocations made in the Outer Hebrides, which is a 9% increase from the proportion of all allocations made in the Outer Hebrides in the preceding year. A further five households were provided with permanent housing elsewhere. This total of 89 households represents 82% of the proportion of new homeless demand in the year, an increase on the 70% of the preceding year. Chart 14 shows the housing outcomes for all cases closed in 2022/23 to 2024/25.

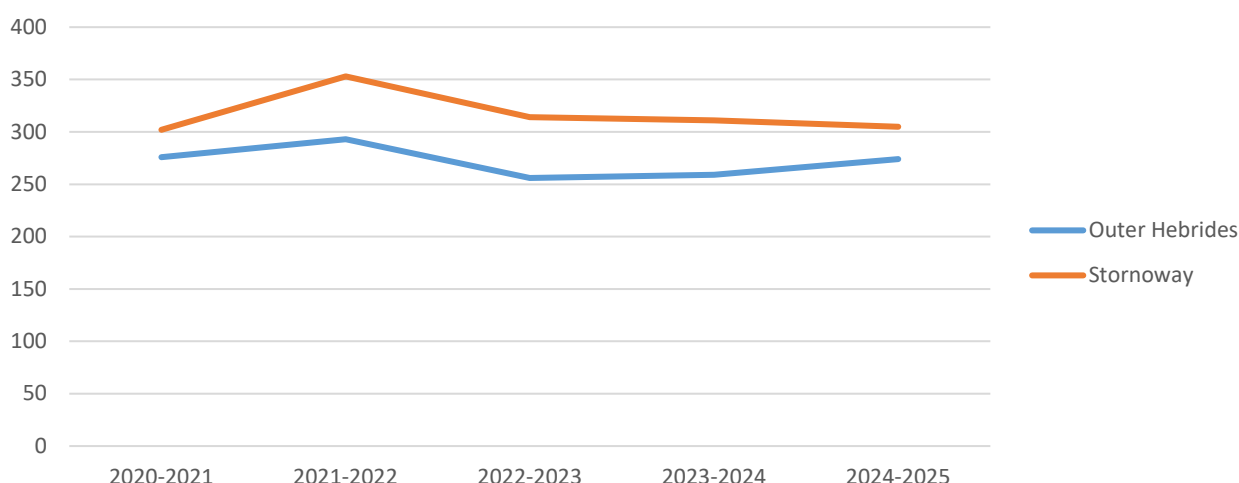
**Chart 14 - Known outcomes for homeless households in the Outer Hebrides for cases closed in 2022/23 – 2024/25.**



- 11.3 Stornoway continues to be the most pressurised area. Of all social housing allocations made in 2024/25 in Stornoway, 52% were to statutory homeless households. This is the second consecutive year that HHP exceeded the agreed 50% target. The greatest pressure is on the two-apartment list. In 2024/25, HHP allocated 29 two-apartment properties in total, of which 22, or 76%, were made to statutory homeless. At the date of writing this report, 37 homeless households are awaiting an offer of a two-apartment property in Stornoway. This is an increase of 28% on the preceding year and reflects the ongoing pressures. Waiting list times for two and five apartment properties are historically the longest and this impacts on the number of allocations that HHP are able to make. Pressure has decreased slightly on the three-apartment list. There are currently 11 households waiting for an offer of a three-apartment property in Stornoway, a 15% decrease on the same date in the preceding year.
- 11.4 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 2025 and have committed to the same for a further year. This temporary target will be reviewed again after 12 months.

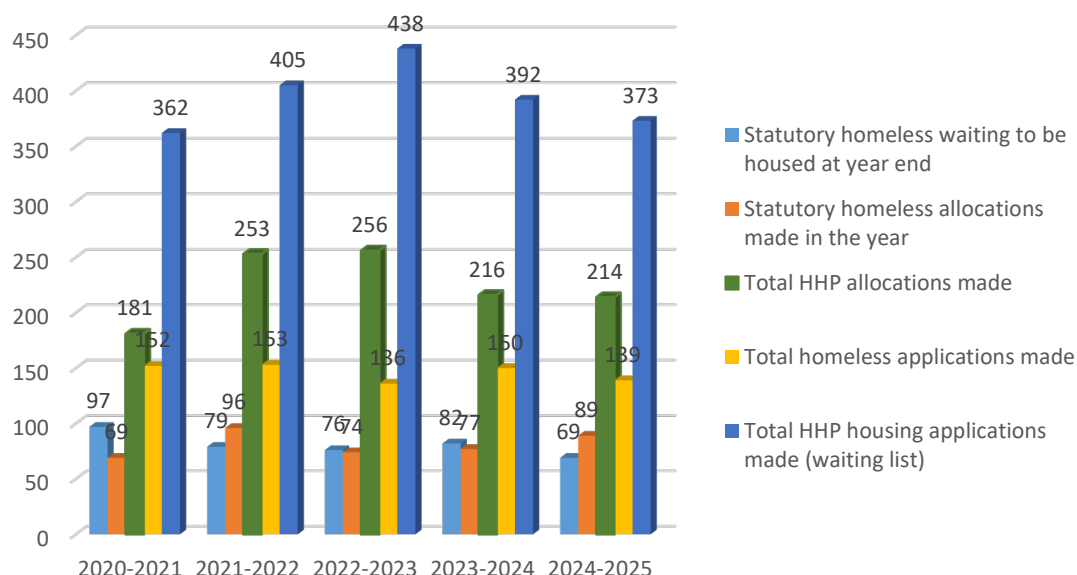
11.5 The average length of time taken to make a first offer of permanent housing to statutory homeless households was 238 days in 2024/25, a 5% decrease on the 250 days taken in 2023/24. However, it took an average of 274 days, 7% longer than the preceding year, for all priority homeless households to 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 three months from the date of the Comhairle's homelessness decision. In 2024/25, 30% of first offers were made within three months. Of these, 29.6% of first offers were made within three months across Lewis and Harris, and 33% of first offers were made within three months in Uist and Barra. Although waiting times decreased slightly for Stornoway, overall waiting times across the Outer Hebrides increased.

**Chart 15 – Average waiting times (days) to being permanently housed for cases closed in the year 2020/21–2024/25**



11.6 Chart 17 below illustrates housing trends over the past five years and the associated pressures on waiting lists. The series 'statutory homeless waiting to be housed' represents the number of households recorded on 31 March each year. This year's figure was a decrease of 16% from the previous year and represented the lowest figure since 2007/08, as discussed at 10.1.

**Chart 16 – Housing and homelessness trends 2020/21-2024/25**



- 11.6 In the period 2024/25, five statutory homeless households were accommodated permanently through the private sector. This represented 4.5% of all new homeless demand. Using both social and private lets as housing outcomes for statutory homeless, the Comhairle housed 85% of the new homeless demand for the year.

## **HOMELESSNESS SUPPORT PROVISION**

- 12.1 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. Twenty-one new referrals were made to this service between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025.
- 12.2 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, Hebrides Alpha, Dochas, Cothrom, Western Isles Citizen's Advice Bureau, Eilean Siar Food Bank, Uist and Barra Foodbank, and local Churches.
- 12.3 The Comhairle has made good progress in the development of Housing First Support with the first HHP tenancy commencing in 2020, and eight tenancies in place by the end of March 2025. 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. Clients can re-engage with support if required, and this has been the case for one client in the past year. There have been no failed Housing First tenancies to date.
- 12.4 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 and at Christmas. Food parcels are distributed to all homeless households in temporary accommodation at Christmas.
- 12.5 Tenancy sustainment levels continue to be high with 94.8% of the 77 homeless applicants housed permanently under homelessness legislation in 2023-2024 sustaining their tenancy for more than one year. However, only two of the four tenancies that were not sustained would be regarded as a failed tenancy as, of the others, one was given up for a positive reason, such as moving in with a partner or moving away for employment, and another was due to a death. For all households housed by HHP from the general waiting list in 2023-2024, 88.5% sustained their tenancy for more than one year.
- 12.6 Households applying as homeless are asked if they have any of a number of support needs. In 2024/25, 41% of applicants stated that they required support due to a mental health issue. This is lower than the figure of 46% for 2023/24. A further 8% stated that they required support due to a drug or alcohol dependency, but this is likely to be lower than the actual figure due to an initial failure or unwillingness to disclose. Applications from households with multiple and complex needs remains high. Of all households who identified a support need, 39 had more than one need, 28% of all homeless households. While this is a decrease from the 32% recorded in 2023/24, it reflects the ongoing pressures experienced in securing appropriate support provision for homeless households.

**Table 2 – Support needs as identified by household when making homeless application 2022/23-2024/25**

Support Need	Number of applicants		
	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Mental health	50	69	57
Learning disability	5	7	6
Physical disability	11	17	14
Medical condition	29	50	37
Drug or alcohol dependency	12	15	11
Basic housing management/independent living skills	10	8	8

#### **NORTH AND ISLANDS HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING OPTIONS HUB**

- 13.1 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 cover at least administrative costs. This funding has been reduced from around £10,000 to £5,000 per year.

#### **RAPID REHOUSING TRANSITION PLAN 2019/20-2023/24**

- 14.1 The Comhairle is currently preparing its response to the Scottish Government with respect to an overview of the progress and challenges relating to its Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan which has now reached its five-year conclusion but the work continues. This response has been requested by 3 October 2025. While there has been good progress in most areas, the fundamental aspirations of rapid rehousing have not been fully achieved and, given the current ongoing national housing emergency, it is evident that this is the case generally across Scotland's local authorities.
- 14.2 The Scottish Government has provided funding to assist local authorities with implementing and progressing their RRTPs. The Comhairle has received £50,000 funding each year since 2021/22, and the same level of funding has been confirmed for 2025/26. The majority of this funding has, to date, been allocated to Housing First and to employing staff to facilitate this. While the Comhairle is committed to continuing with the principles of rapid rehousing it will be difficult to fully achieve this without ongoing funding.

## HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION DUTIES

- 15.1 The Housing (Scotland) Bill, introduced to the Scottish Parliament on 26 March 2024 and currently at Stage 3, includes new prevention of homelessness duties for public bodies, including a new role to 'ask and act' about an individual's housing situation. At present, local authorities have a duty to assist anyone threatened with homelessness in the next 56 days. The new Bill extends this duty to six months. The Scottish Government have advised that detailed guidance will accompany the forthcoming legislation. Homelessness prevention will be a core component of ongoing homelessness strategic planning and delivery.

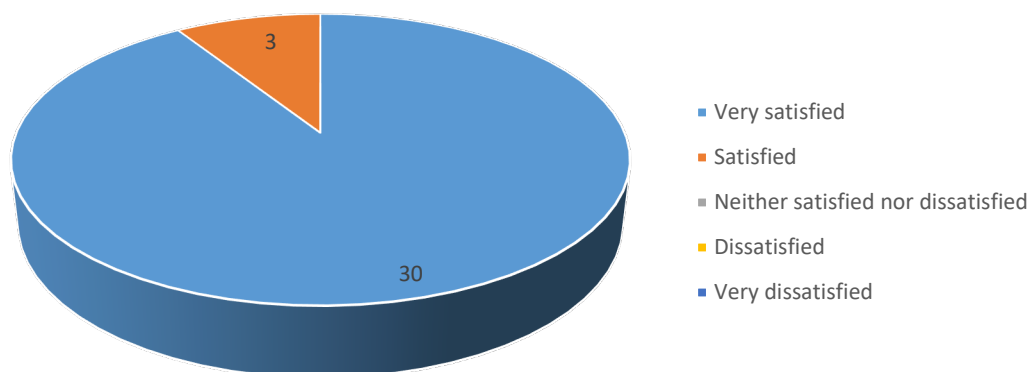
## REVIEWS AND COMPLAINTS

- 16.1 There was one appeal against a homelessness determination in 2024/25 which was upheld. There were no appeals against offers of temporary or permanent accommodation.
- 16.2 There were no formal complaints made about the Homelessness Service in 2024/25.

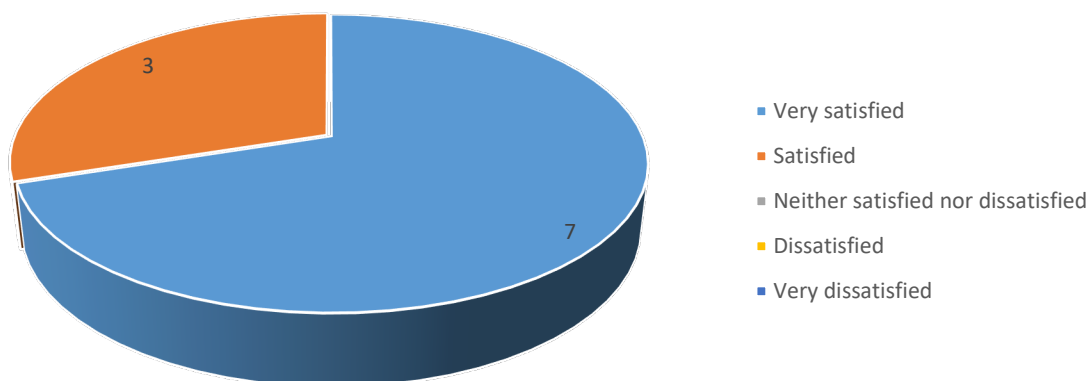
## PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

- 17.1 The Homelessness Service User Questionnaire has 3 stages: initial interview, temporary accommodation and an exit questionnaire. Return rates are variable and generally low. Of all responses received, 100% were satisfied or very satisfied with the initial interview, 100% were satisfied or very satisfied with their temporary accommodation, and 100% rated the overall service as excellent as shown in the following charts:

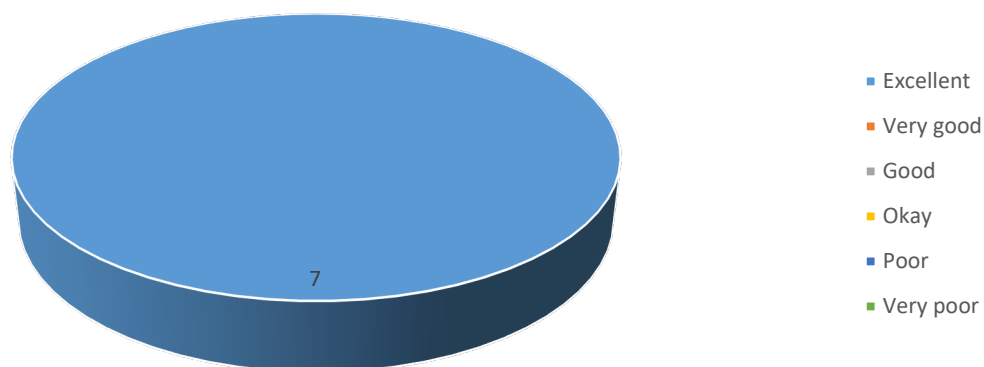
**Chart 17 - Initial Interview satisfaction ratings 2024-2025 (30 returns)**



**Chart 18 – Temporary Accommodation satisfaction ratings 2024-2025 (10 returns)**



**Chart 19 - Exit Questionnaire overall satisfaction ratings 2024-2025 (7 returns)**



17.2 The Comhairle's homelessness standards and targets are illustrated in the table below. In 2024-2025 the Comhairle at least met six out of the eight relevant targets.

**Table 3 – Homelessness Performance Management Framework**

Standard	Type	Actual 2022- 2023	Actual 2023- 2024	Target 2024- 2025	Actual 2024- 2025
<b>Initial Interview</b>					
Interview applicants within 1 working day (unless applicant specifies otherwise)	CNES <sup>2</sup>	100%	100%	90%	<b>100%</b>
<b>Determinations</b>					
Applicants to be advised of homelessness decision within 28 days of interview	SG <sup>3</sup> /SHRIP <sup>4</sup>	90%	94%	80%	<b>94%</b>
Reduction in number of Lost Contacts	SHRIP	4.6%	3.7%	10%	<b>2.1%</b>
%age of homeless cases reassessed within 12 months of completion of duty	SPI <sup>5</sup>	4.4%	4.8%	n/a	<b>3.7%</b>

<sup>2</sup> Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Government

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Housing Regulator Improvement Plan

<sup>5</sup> Statutory Performance Indicator



Standard	Type	Actual 2022- 2023	Actual 2023- 2024	Target 2024- 2025	Actual 2024- 2025
<b>Temporary Accommodation</b>					
Roofless applicants accommodated immediately if presenting out of hours	SG	100%	100%	100%	<b>100%</b>
All applicants requiring temporary accommodation provided with/offered it	SG	100%	100%	100%	<b>100%</b>
Breaches of unsuitable accommodation order	SG	1	1	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Permanent Accommodation</b>					
90 days to first offer	CNES	42%	44%	25%	<b>30%</b>
Second offer within 90 days of first offer	CNES	42%	67%	90%	<b>57%</b>
%age of priority need households housed	SPI	73%	84%	n/a	<b>82%</b>
Tenancy Sustainment for over 12 months	CNES	99%	99%	100%	<b>97.4%</b>
<b>Appeals Board</b>					
Appeal heard within 14 working days of receipt of appeal	CNES	n/a	n/a	100%	<b>n/a</b>
Applicant informed of decision within 3 working days of appeal	CNES	n/a	n/a	100%	<b>n/a</b>
<b>Complaints</b>					
Complainant advised of outcome within 21 days of receipt of complaint	CNES	100%	100%	100%	<b>n/a</b>

## CONCLUSION

- 18.1 Homelessness applications in the Outer Hebrides decreased by 7% for the period of 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. The average length of time taken for homeless households to be provided with permanent accommodation decreased to 238 days from the preceding year's 256 days. However, overall lengths of stay in temporary accommodation increased from 187 to 209 days. The increase in the number of permanent allocations, combined with a decrease in the number of homeless households presenting, resulted in the lowest backlog of statutory homeless awaiting an offer of permanent accommodation at the end of March 2025 since 2007/08.
- 18.2 There are ongoing pressures on the two and five-apartment waiting lists, particularly the two-apartment list for Stornoway. However, 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 2026, the impact of which requires ongoing monitoring.
- 18.3 There has therefore been some good progress in achieving the overall aims of the Comhairle's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan. Eight Housing First tenancies were in operation in the Outer Hebrides at the end of March 2024, and waiting times to a permanent offer reduced. However, ongoing pressures on housing have prevented the core aspirations of rapid rehousing from being fully realised within the initial five-year timeframe. There is also currently increasing pressure on temporary accommodation which does not allow for a reduction in the number of properties used for this purpose. Regardless, the Comhairle will continue to work with partners towards these ends. The forthcoming Homelessness Prevention Duties offer an opportunity to ameliorate existing pressures, but it is anticipated that comprehensive guidance for all public bodies and appreciable funding will be required if they are to prove effective in resolving housing issues prior to homelessness occurring. This guidance will underpin future strategic planning and delivery for homelessness prevention and wider homelessness issues.
- 18.4 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.