HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: **Care, Learning and Housing Committee**

Date: **18 October 2018**

Report Title: **Housing Allocations Policy – Annual Report**

Report By: **Director of Community Services**

1   Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1   This report provides annual monitoring information on the operation of the Highland Housing Register (HHR) Allocations Policy. It highlights key issues in relation to the supply and demand for social rented housing in Highland. The report also identifies areas for further policy review.

2   Recommendations

2.1   Members are invited to:

    i.   note the information contained in the Annual Monitoring Report which identifies that the policy is achieving its objectives in relation to meeting housing needs; and

    ii.   note that a policy review focusing on the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 is due to take place this year.

3 Background

3.1 The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 as amended by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 sets out the main legal duties regarding access to housing registers and the allocation of social rented housing.

3.2 The Highland Council and the five main registered social landlords in Highland implemented a common housing register with a single allocations policy in 2008. The Highland Housing Register (HHR) is subject to ongoing monitoring with an annual report to this Committee and to the Boards of partner organisations. The annual HHR allocations monitoring report for 2017/18 is set out in **Appendix 1.**

4 Allocations Monitoring

4.1 The number of applicants on the register has increased by 169 (2%) in the last year, and stood at 7,890 as at 31 March 2018. This is the third year running that there has been an increase in applications for housing within Highland.

4.2 There were a total of 2,526 offers of housing made by all the partners in 2017/18. As a result of these 1,749 applicants were housed. This equates to approximately 1.3 offers made for each property let. The number of applications with homeless priority points increased by 1% to 690 applications at 31 March 2018, which equates to 9% of all applications held.

4.3 At 31 March 2018 there were a total of 174 applications suspended, of which 13 applications were due to the refusal of two offers of reasonable housing. The details of suspensions are detailed at Chart 12 of **Appendix 1**.

4.4 The annual monitoring report demonstrates that the housing allocations policy is largely meeting its objectives in relation to meeting housing needs. Chart 10 in **Appendix 1** provides a summary of the proportion of applicants in each category of need and the proportion of applicants with those needs being housed.

4.5 The Annual Monitoring Report also contains information on the number of housing applications and the outcomes for applicants from different ethnic groups. As from 1 March 2017 the Equal Opportunities form has been incorporated as a tear off sheet in the main application form which has enabled HHR partners to collate more accurate equalities information of applicants.

5 Need to Reside

5.1 Need to Reside points reflect a need for an applicant to be housed in a particular community whether they live or work there or have a care and support need to be there. Points are awarded where applicants can prove that they been resident in a community for at least 12 months (at the point of the offer of housing). This policy was adopted in early 2016 and now 84% of all applicants housed during the period 2017/2018 had Need to Reside points. This is a 2% increase on the previous year.

6 Low Demand housing in Caithness

6.1 Choice Based Lettings was introduced in Caithness in 2015 to address issues of low demand. Introduced initially in the Wick area, this has been extended to include Thurso and now all properties (with the exception of sheltered units) in the Caithness area are allocated under Choice Based Lettings.

6.2   A formal review of the Choice Based lettings system will be incorporated in the upcoming HHR policy review. There continue to be properties in particular locations where there is limited demand and where other regeneration options should be considered. This will be subject to a report to the Caithness Committee.

7   Armed Forces

7.1   Data about the Armed Forces has been captured on Highland Housing Register applications since February 2014 and on re-registration forms since July 2014. There are currently 24 serving members and 33 previous members of the Armed Forces on the housing register. This group makes up 1% of all applicants looking for rehousing in Highland.

7.2   We continue to work closely with the Armed Forces Covenant to address any issues for applicants who may be finding it difficult to access Housing Services.

8   Online Form & Housing Options Website

8.1   An online HHR application form went live in November 2015. Applicants can also use the Highland Council website to apply using the My Account function.   Online applications equate to 15% of the annual HHR applications and it is anticipated that a media promotion of the online form will increase this proportion further in 2018/19.

8.2   The Highland Council's website now allows applicants to look at demand and supply of accommodation throughout Highland, giving applicants a better understanding of their prospects when applying for social housing: https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/925/council_housing/244/apply_for_a_house/5

9   Future Policy Review

9.1   The Scottish Government has published final guidance in relation to the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 which will come into effect in May 2019. The provisions in the Act are intended to increase landlord flexibility in making the best use of social housing available to them. This includes reviewing the priority awarded to applicants with an unmet housing need and also the option to take property ownership into consideration.

9.2   Highland Housing Register Partners intend to conduct a joint review of the HHR policy in line with the legislative changes over the coming year. Any proposed changes to current policy will be reported to Committee for approval.

9.3   The Scottish Government has accepted the proposals of the Homeless and Rough Sleeping Action Group which was set up to conduct a national review into homelessness and rough sleeping. Among these recommendations is the requirement for local authorities to submit a Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan by 31 December 2018. This will identify how councils can move homeless applicants into permanent accommodation as quickly as possible.

9.4   The Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan will be submitted to Members in December for their approval. As yet it is unclear what impact the Plan will have on HHR Allocations Policy but it may provide recommendations for raising awareness of our housing options approach and increasing the scope of what constitutes a reasonable offer for homeless applicants.

10   Consultation with Service Users

10.1   One of the requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 is a legal duty on social landlords to consult with service users on proposed amendments to allocations policies.

10.2   As part of the forthcoming HHR policy review, tenants and applicants will be consulted on any potential policy changes ahead of Committee approval. This will take place ahead of the May 2019 deadline for the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 coming into effect.

11   Implications

11.1   Resources - There are no specific implications arising from this report.

11.2   Legal - The current housing allocation policy is considered to meet current legal requirements and none of the recommendations in the report would have legal implications.

11.3   Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) - One of the main aims of the allocation policy is to allow access to housing based on housing need. There are specific issues in relation to housing allocations in small rural communities. The current policy seeks to address these through the award of priority for people with a need to reside within a particular community. Competing pressures for available housing can be more acute in small communities with limited housing stock and turnover.

11.4   Climate Change / Carbon Clever - There are no specific implications arising from this report.

11.5   Risk - There are no specific implications arising from this report.

11.6   Gaelic - Housing applications and related published material about access to housing meet the Council's standards in relation to Gaelic.

Designation: Director of Community Services

Date: 1 October 2018

Author: Lyndsey Greene, Housing Policy Officer

Highland Housing Register

**Allocations Monitoring Report 2017/2018**

1.   Introduction

1.1.1   The Highland Housing Register Allocations Policy sets out details for annual performance monitoring. The Aims of the Policy are
-      To provide housing to those in the greatest need, dependent on individual circumstances
-      To help to prevent and deal with homelessness.
-      To help create and maintain strong and economically viable communities.
-      To work with our partner HHR landlords to provide suitable housing for those with special needs.
-      To make the best use of the housing available.
-      To give applicants a range of choices of housing.
-      To help applicants move within the Highland area, and from other parts of the UK.
-      To inform the Highland Council's planning processes.

1.2   This report relates to the period 1 April 2017 - 31 March 2018. It contains monitoring information and commentary summarising how the housing allocations policy has operated over the last year.

1.3   The figures are for all the Highland Housing Register Partners and do not just relate to the Highland Council.

## 2.   Monitoring Information

2.1   Applications

2.1.1   There were a total of 7,890 applications at 31 March 2018, compared to 7,721 at 31 March 2017, an increase of 169. This is the third year running that we have seen an increase in the number of applicants looking for social renting.

2.1.2   Chart 1 shows the percentage of all Highland Housing Register applications broken down by those seeking a social rented tenancy from an HHR partner (Housing List: 5,757 applicants) and those from existing tenants seeking to transfer to another property: (Transfer List: 2,133 applicants). The proportions last year were 5,642 (73%) Housing List and 2,079 (27%) Transfer List.

Chart 1 - HHR Waiting List

Transfer List
27%

Waiting List
73%
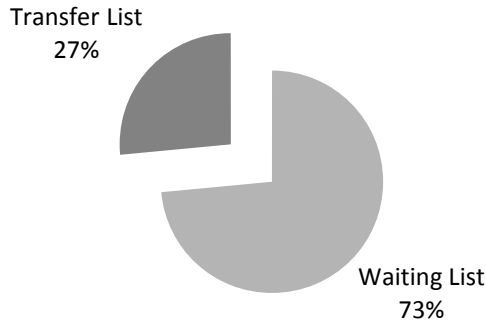
2.1.3 Chart 2 shows the number of applications each HHR partner received. There were a total of 4,866 applications received last year. The partner who received the most applications was Highland Council with 4,328 followed by Albyn Housing with 286, Lochalsh & Skye Housing Association with 84, Lochaber Housing Association with 64, Cairn Housing Association with 59 and Pentland Housing Association with 45 applications received. The numbers of applications received are fairly static compared to the previous two years however the figures for Highland Council may be higher as result of it being the only HHR partner able to initially process the online applications.

Chart 2 - No of Applications Received

Lochaber
2%

Lochalsh & Skye
2%

Cairn
2%

Pentland
1%

Albyn
5%

Highland Council
88%
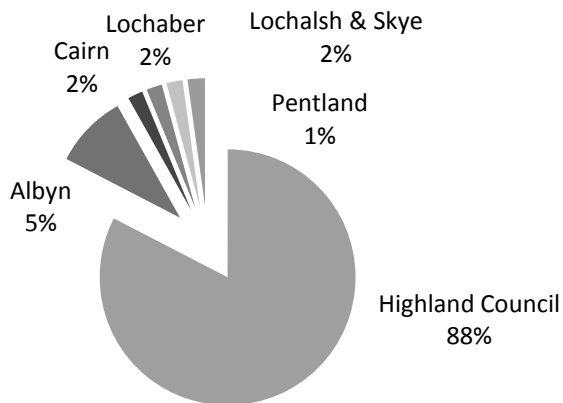
2.1.4 Chart 3 shows the total number of applicants broken down by age group. It shows that the largest group continues to be the 25-59 age range which has increased slightly to 64% of all applicants. The 60+ age group has remained static at 20% while the 16-25 group has increased by 1% to 16%.

Chart 3 - Age Group

60+
20%

16-25
16%

25-29
64%
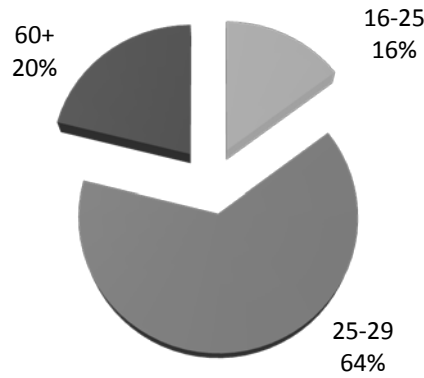
2.1.5 Chart 4 shows the number of applications by household type. It shows that the largest category group continues to be single applicants (48%), with applications from couples at 10% and applications from families at 42%. The relative proportions are broadly similar to those reported last year.

Chart 4 - Household Type

Families
42%

Single
48%

Couples
10%
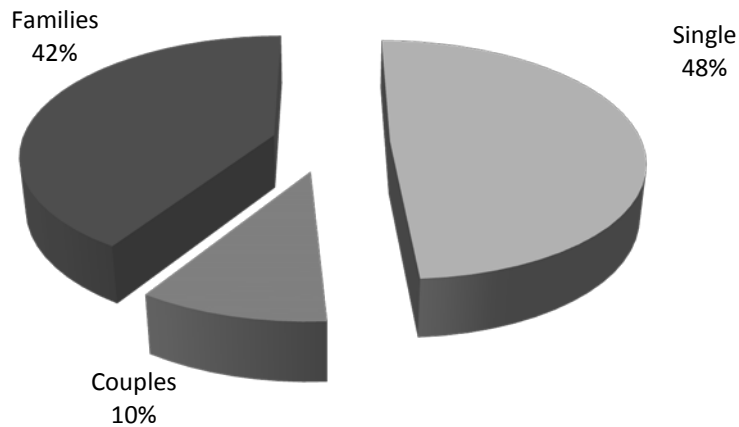
2.2 Allocations

2.2.1 Chart 5 shows that 1,749 applicants were housed in 2017/18 and shows the trend in applicants housed over time. It indicates that there has been a slight increase in the numbers housed in the last year.

Chart 5 - Number of Housed Applicants
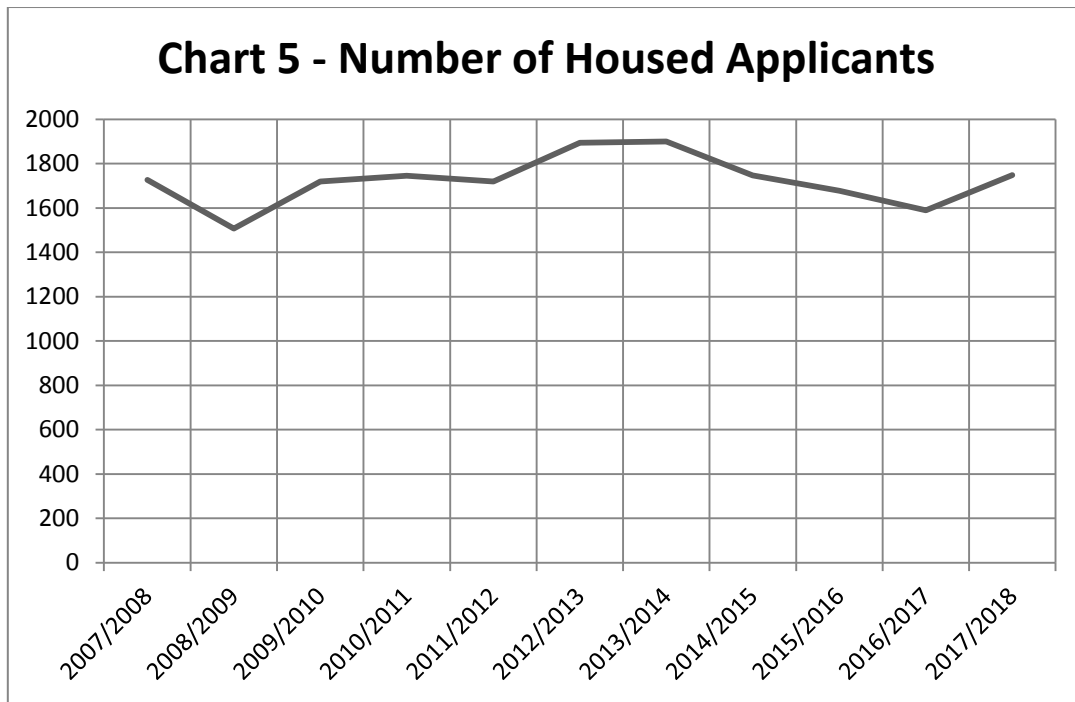
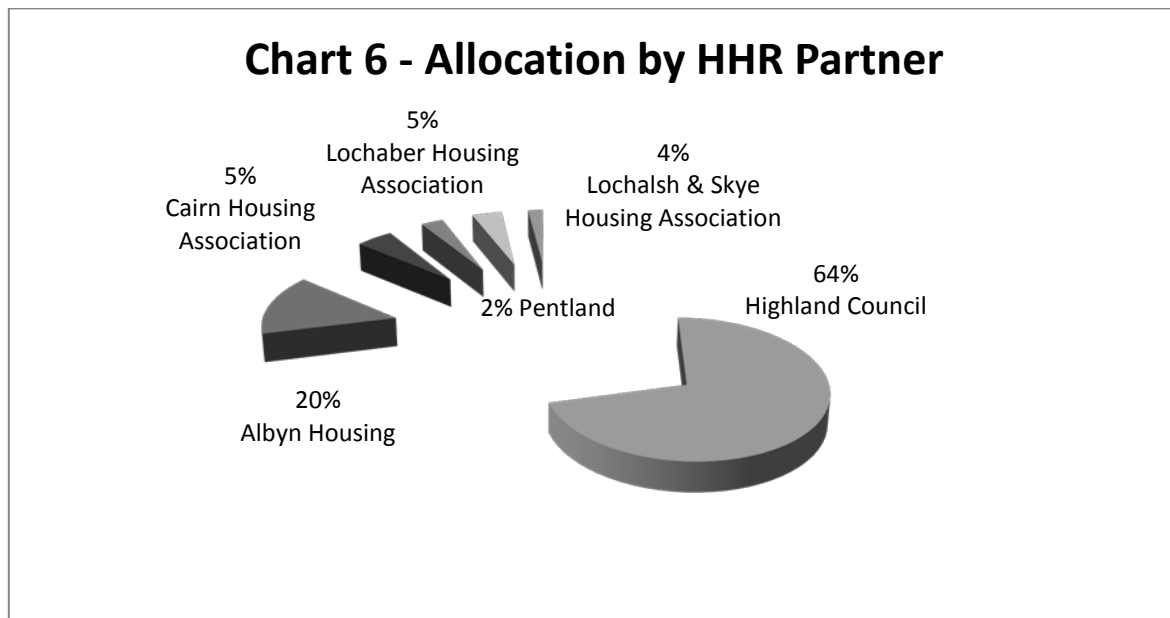2.2.2 Of the 1,749 applicants housed in 2017/18, 1,314 (75%) were from the Housing List and 435 (25%) were from the Transfer List. Allocations to Highland Council houses accounted for 1,111 (64%) of all applicants housed which is a 3% decrease on the previous year.

2.2.3 Chart 6 shows the breakdown of the proportion of applicants housed by individual HHR Partners. Albyn Housing (346) has risen by 3%, Lochalsh & Skye Housing Association (73) by 2% and Lochaber Housing Association (83) by 1%. Cairn (94) and Pentland (42) have decreased by 1%. Highland Council (1,111) have decreased by 3% overall.

Chart 6 - Allocation by HHR Partner

2.2.5   Chart 7 shows how many offers each partner made.

Chart 7 - No of Offers Made

■ No of Offers Made (Includes withdrawls/refusals)

Partner	No of Offers
The Highland Council	1802
Pentland Housing Association	60
Lochalsh Housing Association	96
Lochaber Housing Association	101
Cairn Housing Association	136
Albyn Housing Society	331
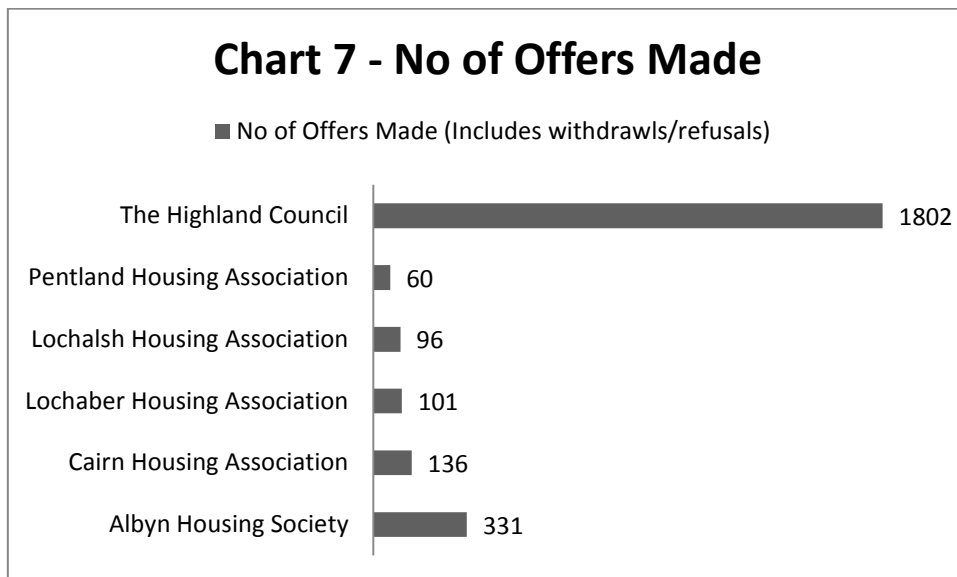
2.2.6   The table below shows the comparison over the last two years in respect of all received, housed, cancelled and total applications held by each area office. This does not include reinstated applications within the reporting period or those housed by mutual exchange or through other participating landlords (for example, Trust Housing Association or Key Housing).

Area Office	Total Applications held - 31/03/17	Total Housed - 31/03/18	Total Cancelled 31/03/18	Total new Apps Received - 31/03/18	Total Applications Held - 31/03/18
Albyn HS	603	346	191	286	534
Cairn HA	314	94	88	59	258
Lochaber HA	137	83	54	64	123
Lochalsh & Skye HA	142	73	45	84	142
Pentland HA	90	42	35	45	69
Alness	440	140	195	170	63
Badenoch & Strathspey	375	33	143	207	405
Dingwall	827	101	384	830	1285
Inverness	2784	285	714	1424	3052
Lochaber	632	150	260	471	618
Nairn	300	31	126	207	335
Portree	317	45	152	176	254
Sutherland	229	67	162	252	244
Thurso	275	108	170	269	244
Wick	256	151	165	322	264

2.3   Allocations – Ethnic Origins for Applicants & Housed Applicants

2.3.1 This section of the HHR application form is not compulsory and therefore the figures reported may not be fully representative of all applicants. Since March 2017 the equal opportunities form has been incorporated into the main application form and it is hoped that this will provide us with better qualitative data going forward.

2.3.2 Chart 9 shows that the largest group of those who completed the form describe themselves as Scottish: 2,642 (78%) applicants and 441 (75%) housed applicants. British and Other White applicants are the next largest groups.

Chart 9 – Applicants by Ethnic Origin

Ethnic Origin	Number of Applications	Number Housed
White Scottish	2642	441
White Other British	419	81
White Irish	14	6
White Gypsy/Traveller	4	1
White Polish	106	33
White Other	154	20
Mixed or Multiple Ethnic	6	3
Indian	8	1
Pakistani	2	-
Bangladeshi	5	-
Chinese	-	-
Other Asian	4	1
Caribbean	1	-
African	5	-
Other Black	2	1
Arab	1	1
Other Ethnic	9	1
Unknown	1	1
TOTAL	**3383**	**591**

2.4   Allocations – Letting Zones & Homeless Demand

2.4.1 Chart 10 shows the number of houses in each letting area; the number of applicants where the letting area is their first choice for housing; and the number and percentage of applicants housed last year in each area, as well as the number and percentage of applicants with homeless priority.

Chart 10: Housing Supply Demand and Numbers Housed including Homeless Priority

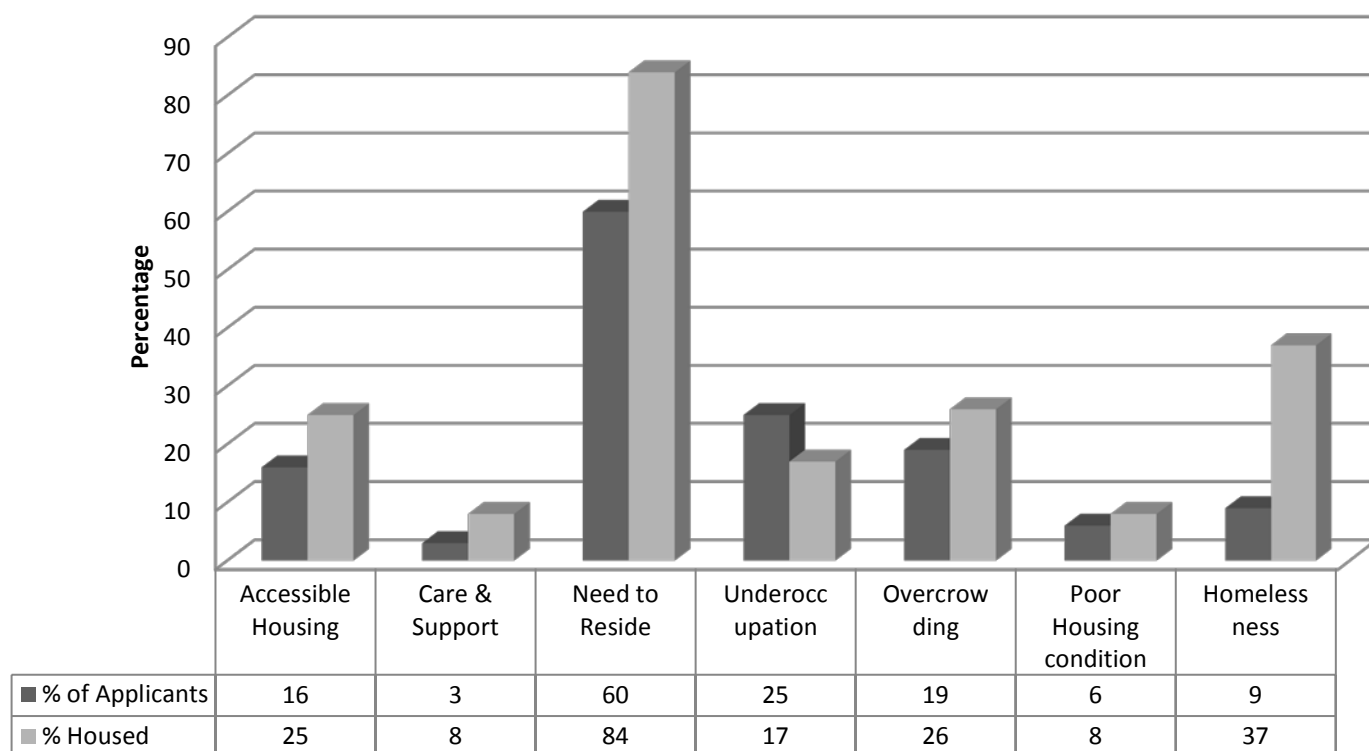| ZONE	Total Stock	Total Demand (First choice)	Homeless Demand	Total Housed	% Housed of Demand	Total Homeless Housed	% of Homeless Housed of Total
Alness/Invergordon	2061	420	31	176	41%	67	38%
Ardersier	1040	848	97	51	6%	24	47%
Aviemore	480	281	11	33	12%	13	39%
Beauly	275	187	9	25	13%	7	28%
Black Isle	447	190	13	43	23%	16	37%
Central Lochaber	1286	489	35	180	37%	70	39%
East Caithness	1403	212	3	182	86%	20	11%
East Sutherland	861	220	3	64	29%	9	14%
Gairloch	136	32	0	14	44%	3	21%
Grantown	226	127	9	18	14%	12	67%
Inverness City	4483	2093	319	331	16%	212	64%
Kingussie	165	84	5	12	14%	8	67%
Lochalsh	239	76	8	31	41%	12	39%
Lochcarron	102	48	2	12	25%	1	8%
LochNess	190	118	1	6	5%	2	33%
Mid Ross	1374	492	56	108	22%	49	45%
Nairn	839	347	18	52	15%	21	40%
North East Lochaber	85	22	0	4	18%	2	50%
North Skye	612	230	40	53	23%	25	47%
North West Sutherland	231	43	2	25	58%	0	0%
Peninsula	131	39	0	12	31%	3	25%
Rural Nairn	93	47	0	4	9%	1	25%
South Lochaber	289	92	4	29	10%	4	14%
South Skye	257	83	9	35	42%	13	37%
Tain	771	179	7	60	34%	32	53%
Tomatin	24	15	0	2	14%	1	50%
Ullapool	180	96	4	14	15%	6	43%
West Caithness	1406	278	2	168	6%	18	11%
West Lochaber	163	49	2	12	25%	2	17%
TOTAL	**19,851**	**7,437**	**690**	**1,756**	**24%**	**653**	**37%**

This gives an overall view of relative housing supply / demand and pressure. It shows that in most areas of Highland, demand for housing far exceeds supply. A low percentage of people housed in comparison to the number of people seeking housing in an area is an indicator of housing pressure.

2.4.3   The number of homeless applicants housed has increased in 2017/2018 to 653 homeless applicants housed compared to 547 in 2016/17 and the number of applicants with homeless status has risen by 48 to 690 in 2017/18. The proportions of lets to homeless households tends to reflect the general pattern of housing pressure, with a higher proportion of lets to homeless people in areas of greatest housing pressure.

2.5   Allocations – Points Category

2.5.1   Chart 11 shows the percentage of applicants who have been awarded points for housing need categories contained in the Allocations Policy compared to the percentage of applicants housed with these categories of points.

Chart 11 - Points Categories

|	Accessible Housing	Care & Support	Need to Reside	Underoccupation	Overcrowding	Poor Housing condition	Homelessness
■ % of Applicants	16	3	60	25	19	6	9
■ % Housed	25	8	84	17	26	8	37

2.5.2   This graph shows that in most cases applicants with the greatest housing needs are more likely to be housed.

2.6   Suspended Applications

2.6.1   Chart 12 shows the breakdown by reason for the 174 applications which were suspended from receiving offers at 31 March 2018. The total number of applicants suspended accounts for 2% of all applicants, which is a slight decrease from last year. Most suspensions result from people being in rent arrears (74) followed by those with an interim homeless accommodation decision (38) who have been assessed as requiring additional support before being allocated a tenancy. This is the fifth consecutive year that rent arrears have been the most common reason for applicants being suspended. 13 applicants were suspended following refusal of two reasonable offers of housing, which is the fourth consecutive year we have seen a reduction. This is attributed to more robust Housing Options conversations taking place at an early stage and regular liaison with applicants throughout the process.

Chart 12: Suspended applications
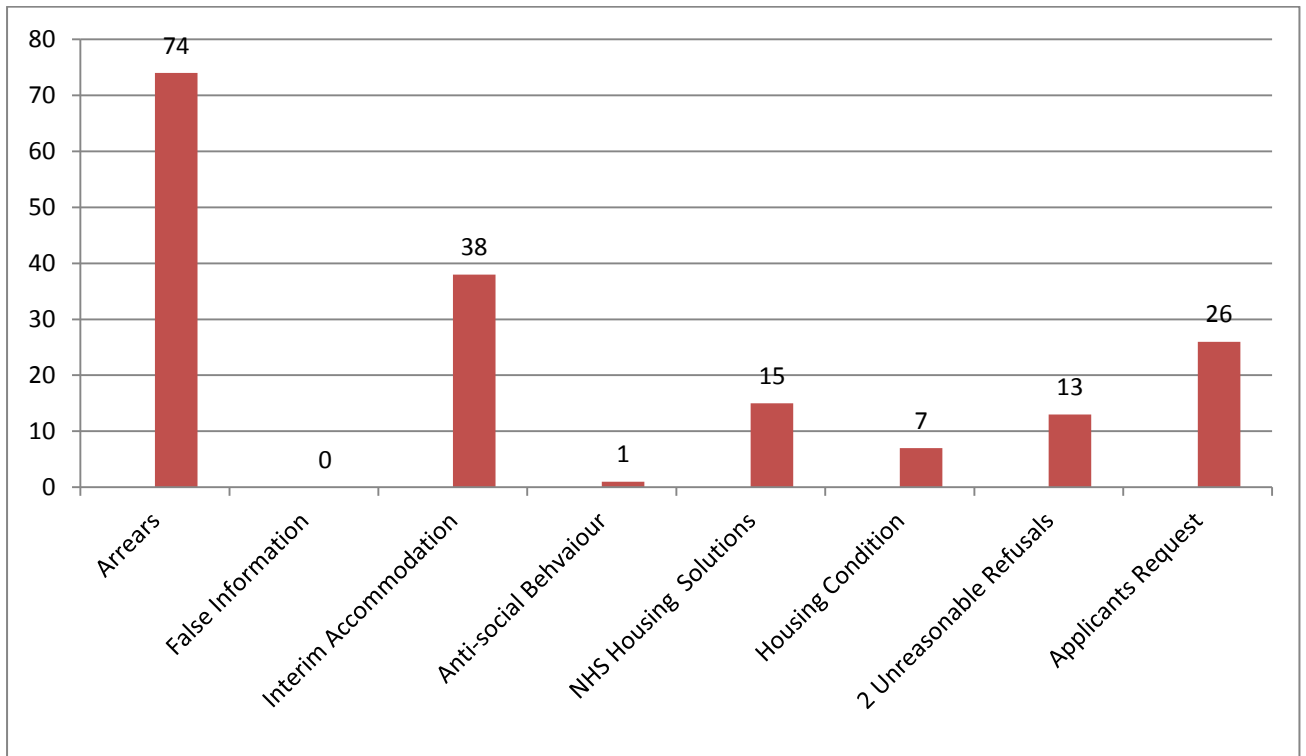
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Date: 01 October 2018