

Agenda Item	<b>6</b>
Report No	<b>HP/10/21</b>

## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Housing and Property

**Date:** 11 June 2021

**Report Title:** Annual Monitoring Report 2020/2021: Highland Housing Register Allocations

**Report By:** Executive Chief Officer (Housing and Property)

### 1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the annual performance review of the Highland Housing Register (HHR) Policy for 2020/2021. It provides information on the need for social rented housing and describes how it is being met through the policy. The report also provides updates on the policy context, issues for policy review and associated consultation.

### 2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to: -

- **Note** the information contained in the Annual Monitoring Report on housing allocations which demonstrates that the policy is achieving its objectives;
- **Note** the main issues being considered as part of the HHR Allocation Policy review which is still underway; and
- **Approve** changes to the Mutual Exchanges Policy as outlined in section 7.4 of the report.

### 3 Implications

3.1 **Resources:** There are no specific implications arising from this report.

3.2 **Legal:** There are no specific implications arising from this report.

3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural):** Quality, low-cost affordable housing is key driver for reducing and preventing poverty. The Allocation Policy enables equitable access based on evidence of each applicant's need for housing. An Equalities Impact Assessment is informing the Policy review.

3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever:** No implications arising from this report.

- 3.5 **Gaelic:** Housing applications and related published material about access to housing meet the Council's standards in relation to Gaelic.
- 3.6 **Risk:** There are no specific implications arising from this report.

## 4 Background

- 4.1 This annual report on Highland Housing Register activity supports policy monitoring, illustrates pressures and indicates where changes may be needed. It helps to raise awareness of how the process operates, provides transparency and contributes to highlighting the importance of affordable housing in supporting strong communities and local economies.
- 4.2 Social rented housing provides affordable homes for over 20,000 households across Highland. Compared to Scotland, Highland has proportionally less social rented housing: 18% compared to 23% (the 8th lowest in Scotland).
- 4.3 The process for allocating social rented housing is bound by legal duties and informed by statutory guidance, including from the: Housing (Scotland) Act 1987; Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 and the Council's statutory homelessness duties.
- 4.4 The Highland Housing Register (HHR) Partnership has developed and maintains a shared single Allocation Policy. This has streamlined and simplified the process of accessing social rented housing in Highland. The analysis and data for 2020/21 is set out in **Appendix 1** and is summarised here.
- 4.5 It should be noted that Caledonia Housing Association formally joined the Highland Housing Register partnership from 1 April 2020 and details of allocations involving Caledonia are included in this report for the first time.
- 4.6 The coronavirus pandemic has had a major impact on housing allocations, and this will be detailed further in the report.

## 5 Housing Demand

- 5.1 There were a total of 9,959 'Housing' and 'Transfer' List applications on the Housing Register at the end of 2020/2021 compared to 7,785 in 2019/2020. Of all applications held at the end of last year, 74% are not currently the tenant of a Highland Housing Register landlord. Half of these applicants are privately renting or living with family. Almost 1,000 households are living in temporary 'homeless' accommodation or are 'homeless at home'. Many of these homeless households, particularly in Inverness, are young people or families with children.
- 5.2 The continuing need for smaller sized properties is clear. Half of all applicants are single people and 10% are couples. This varies across Highland.
- 5.3 The highest demand for housing in terms of the number of applications remains Inverness (where 39% of all applicants want to be housed), followed by Ross and Cromarty (21%) and Lochaber (12%). This trend has remained stable across several years.

- 5.4 However, whilst around 4 out of 10 applicants are seeking housing in the Inverness area, the lack of housing availability means that less than 3 out of 10 (30%) lets are made there.
- 5.5 The pressure on housing varies across Highland. This means that applicants whose need for housing is less acute are able to receive offers of housing more quickly in some areas than applicants with more acute housing needs in other areas. Analysis of the number applying for each house being let indicates that the pressure on social rented housing is greatest in Lochaber, followed by, respectively, Badenoch & Strathspey, Nairn, Mid-Ross and Inverness. Housing pressure in those five areas is far greater than the Highland average. Pressures also vary significantly across communities within areas, for example within the communities of Aviemore and West Lochaber. It continues to be relatively easier to access affordable housing in Caithness and in areas of Sutherland.
- 5.6 Information and advice are available to help applicants increase their prospects of a housing offer. Information gathered through applications indicates that there would be benefits in increasing the promotion of the other options such as: low cost homeownership; mid-market rent and private renting. More promotion of Mutual Exchanges is taking place to help tenants looking to move and a review of the mutual exchange policy is detailed at section 7 of this report.

## **6 Meeting Demand**

- 6.1 Across Highland, 1,300 households were housed in 2020/21. This represents a marked reduction on last year's number which stood at 1,813. This reflects the impact of the pandemic restrictions on void works and re-letting activities.
- 6.2 Around 28% of offers were refused which is 1% lower than the previous year. Refusals take up a large amount of administrative resource for officers and operational procedures have been adapted to reduce the total number of refusals. For example, applicants who are near the top of the housing list are being contacted for a pre-offer discussion to ensure their application is up to date in terms of letting areas and change of circumstances.
- 6.3 The majority of lets continue to be into Council housing (70% of lets, an increase from 62%), followed by Albyn HS (14%); Cairn HA (7%); Lochalsh & Skye HA (5%); Pentland HA (3%); Lochaber HA (1%); and Caledonia (>1%).
- 6.4 Social rented housing providers have a legal duty to give a 'reasonable preference' to priority groups when allocating housing. This includes households who have nowhere safe and secure that they can reasonably stay and so are homeless, and households who are living under unsatisfactory conditions and who have unmet housing needs.
- 6.5 The HHR partners are continuing to meet their duties to house households who are homeless. Across Highland 595 lets - 46% of all lets - went to households with points which reflected their homeless status. This is an increase from 39% last year.
- 6.6 In areas where there is a greater demand for housing, homeless points play a more significant role in leading to a let. For example, 56% of all Inverness area lets were to homeless households (excluding transfers, this equates to 78% of 'Housing List' lets).
- 6.7 Analysis of the proportion of lets to the other various housing needs groups, compared to demand from applicants with those needs, shows that the HHR Allocations Policy is largely meeting its objectives to provide housing to those with the greatest needs. A

quarter of those who were housed had been living in housing which was unsuitable due to their health and social care needs. One-fifth had been living in overcrowded housing.

- 6.8 As well as approaches directly from applicants, HHR partners are committed to assisting with other policy priorities. A total of 28 households were helped to move into their first 'independent living' tenancy, many via our Protocol with NHS Highland, for clients with complex continuing health care and support needs. In addition, 17 care-experienced young people were housed through the Highland Protocol which supports our Corporate Parenting commitments and duties.
- 6.9 Over 8 out of 10 applicants housed had additional points which recognised they had a particular 'Need to Reside' in that community either because they work or are already established there; or are providing or receiving family care or support.
- 6.10 We monitor equalities to make sure we are providing equality of access and no discrimination. In line with the previous year, 76% of applicants described themselves as Scottish. This group accounted for 74% of those housed applicants; 6% of lets went to non-British/White households; and around 2% of lets went to other ethnic minorities. The proportion of lets to households describing themselves as disabled exceeded the proportion of applicants doing so (18% of lets and 15% of applicants).

## **7 Review of the Mutual Exchange Policy**

- 7.1 Mutual Exchanges enable tenants to swap with other tenants. The Policy aim is to give tenants an alternative option for resolving their housing related issues. In 2020/21, 83 households moved into a Highland Housing Register tenancy through a mutual exchange. The exchange option is promoted to tenants looking for a housing transfer.
- 7.2 Legislation recognises that the right to exchange should be balanced with our duty to prioritise those with the greatest need for social housing and make best of use of limited resources.
- 7.3 The HHR Partnership have reviewed the Mutual Exchange policy to ensure:
- people who are in urgent need of housing are prioritised for exchanges. This will avoid the need for them to apply as homeless or to remain in "at risk" situations;
  - the policy is updated in line with the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014; and
  - the policy can respond to the changing needs of Highland's communities.
- 7.4 The new policy clarifies the rights of the applicant and officers will continue to promote mutual exchanges with applicants who otherwise may have a potential lengthy wait for a transfer.
- 7.5 Landlords can however refuse mutual exchanges on reasonable grounds. In line with the updated legislation, it is proposed that mutual exchanges can now be refused if:
- the tenant has not occupied the property as their only or principal home for a period of no less than 12 months;
  - a notice or order of possession has been made against the tenant;
  - one of the properties is a specialised adapted property and the incoming tenant does not require the adaptations;
  - the property is too large or not suitable for the tenant and household's needs;
  - the exchange will cause overcrowding.

7.6 Committee is asked to approve the new mutual exchange policy proposals. Further guidance will be issued to officers to promote mutual exchanges and encourage this as a viable housing option.

## **8 Review of Highland Housing Register Allocation Policy**

- 8.1 The Highland Housing Register Policy review is underway to take account of:
- the passing of the Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Bill in March 2021;
  - new legislation arising from the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014;
  - changes in the national and local policy context;
  - Highland's Rapid Rehousing Plan commitment to significantly reduce homelessness; and
  - to ensure that the process delivers the objectives agreed by the Partnership.
- 8.2 The policy review has focused on potential changes to ensure we are allocating to applicants in the greatest housing need. This includes:-
- Ensuring that the needs of victims of domestic abuse are being addressed in line with best practice and the Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Bill 2021 ;
  - Ensuring that our accessible housing process meets the needs of people who require specialist accommodation; and
  - Reviewing the points allocated for different housing needs.
- 8.3 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 allocation policies. This was carried out in late 2020 via a well-promoted and widely accessible online survey (with a paper-based option for those without digital access). It found that members of the public and partner stakeholders were broadly in favour of purposed changes to the HHR policy.
- 8.4 Further consultation will take place with Members to enable the input of views on the issues and options for policy change prior to a further report to Committee to consider changes to policy.

## **9 Conclusion**

- 9.1 It has been a challenging year for the HHR and its landlords. Covid-19 has brought about large changes to working practices and reduced our ability to allocate. However, the annual report indicates that the HHR is still performing well in meeting housing need and continues to play an important role in supporting good health, strong communities and local economies.
- 9.2 The HHR policy review currently under way will ensure the HHR continues to support those with unmet housing need across Highland and address some of the particular challenges highlighted in **Appendix 1**.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Property and Housing

Date: 12 May 2021

Author: Aodhan Byrne - Housing Policy Officer

## Highland Housing Register Monitoring Report 2020-21

### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report contains monitoring information and commentary on the operation of the Highland Housing Register (HHR) Allocation Policy in 2020-21. The analysis helps to identify possible improvements in meeting housing needs and aspirations in Highland.
- 1.2 The Housing Register is required to comply with the various Housing (Scotland) Acts (1987, 2001 and 2014), homelessness duties and statutory guidance.
- 1.3 The aims of the [Highland Housing Register \(HHR\) Allocations Policy](#) are:
- To provide housing to those in the greatest need, dependant 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 partners 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.
- 1.4 The figures relate to the HHR partners - Albyn Housing Society, Caledonia Housing Association, Cairn Housing Association, Lochalsh & Skye Housing Association, Lochaber Housing Association, Pentland Housing Association and the Highland Council.
- 1.5 In terms of the local context, the HHR Policy operates across a variety of housing markets and communities. Following a higher than national average population increase, in total in Highland, around 236,000 individuals live in 109,000 households. There are around 20,800 social rented properties (2018) in total - 18% of Highland's total housing. This proportion is significantly lower than the national average (23%) and the 8<sup>th</sup> lowest in Scotland. Supply is steadily increasing through the new build programme
- 1.6 Differences in supply means that it is important for applicants to understand that their specific choices affect their likelihood of being made an offer. They are encouraged to use a web-based "Housing Prospects" tool to understand housing availability in different communities and encourage them to maximise their choices. The tool is held here:  
[https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/925/council\\_housing/244/apply\\_for\\_a\\_house/5](https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/925/council_housing/244/apply_for_a_house/5)
- 1.7 Social landlords are required to prioritise households with 'unmet' housing needs (i.e. households who are unable to meet their own needs). Other households can benefit from the increasing supply of alternative options: mid-market renting; and low-cost homeownership (e.g. via open market purchase or new build shared equity models). The HHR partners' websites include details on these options and officers can advise. HHR applicants have priority access to alternative options.
- 1.8 Covid-19 has had a major impact on housing and the Highland Housing Register. Many figures are lower than previous years due to restrictions slowing down or pausing work (the total number of allocations is a good example) while other figures have risen (the total number of HHR applications because of a reduction in allocations and re-registration). The impact of Covid-19 will be a recurring theme throughout.

## 2 Application

2.1 The number of households applying for housing was 9,959 at 31 March 2021. This is a 28% increase from 7,785 in 2019-20.

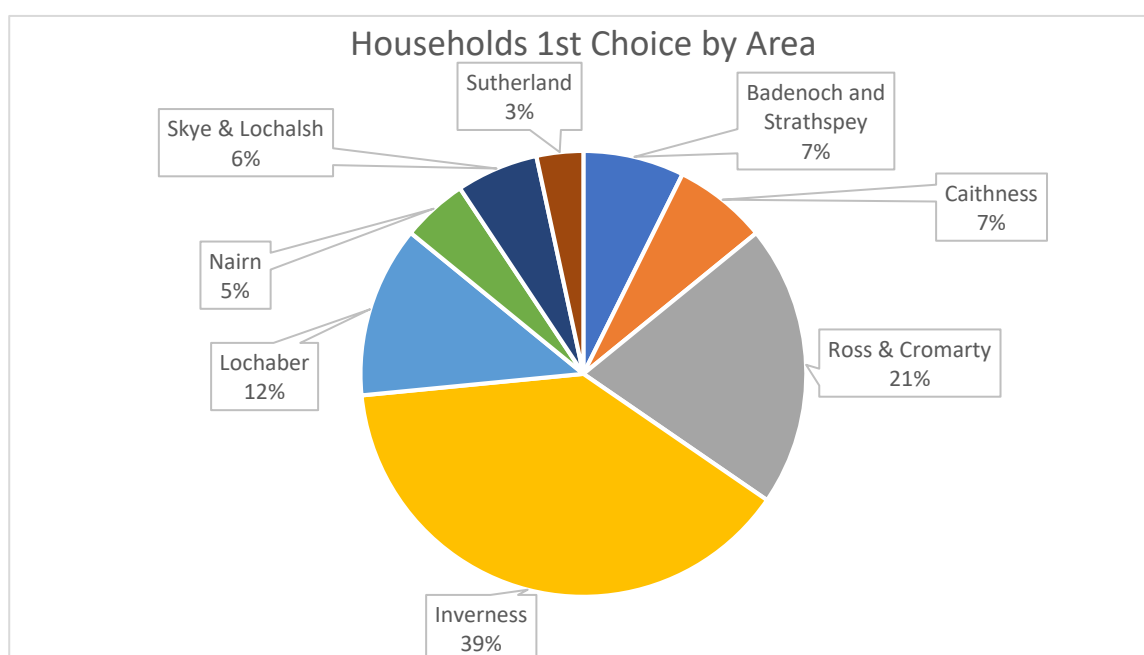
2.2 The increase in applications is largely a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Scottish Government restrictions on moving to a new house and re-let works meant that there was a focus on emergency homelessness allocations rather than non-homeless and transfer allocations. In 2020-21 there were over 500 less allocations compared to the previous year.

2.3 In addition, to ensure that applicants were not disadvantaged during the pandemic the HHR partners agreed to pause routine annual reviews and re-registration of applicants.

2.4 The demand for affordable housing is not reducing. Around 1 in 4 applicants (26%, 2,661) are existing HHR tenants applying for a 'Transfer List' move. Most households are applying to the 'Housing List' looking to move in as 'new' tenants (74%, 7,298). Half of all housing list applicants are privately renting or living with parents/relatives; over 1 in 10 are in temporary homeless accommodation and just under 1 in 10 are currently homeowners.

2.5 Most applicants (39%, 3,741 households) are looking to be housed in Inverness followed by Ross and Cromarty (21%, 1,969 households), then Lochaber, (12%, 1,197). Broadly similar numbers of households are seeking housing in Badenoch & Strathspey, Caithness, Nairn and Skye & Lochalsh. There is very little change from 2019-20 in terms of percentage share. Chart 1 illustrates this split across Highland.

**Chart 1 – Households applying by area**



2.6 Table 1 sets out how many applicants are waiting for each property size against the available stock in the area. The demand for small properties is clear. Half of all HHR applicants are single people; only 10% are couples whilst 40% are families. This has not changed from 2019-20. This pressure on smaller properties is greater in some areas – for example, in Skye 70% of applicants require only one bedroom.

2.7 In order to re-house single and couple households, HHR landlords will need to allocate more two-bedroom properties to these households. New build development will also need to focus on reducing the large gap between demand and supply.

2.8 While only constituting 1% of overall need, 149 households require 5 bedrooms or more and they may have to wait a considerable time to be allocated this size of property.

**Table 1 - Number of Bedrooms Required by Applicants**

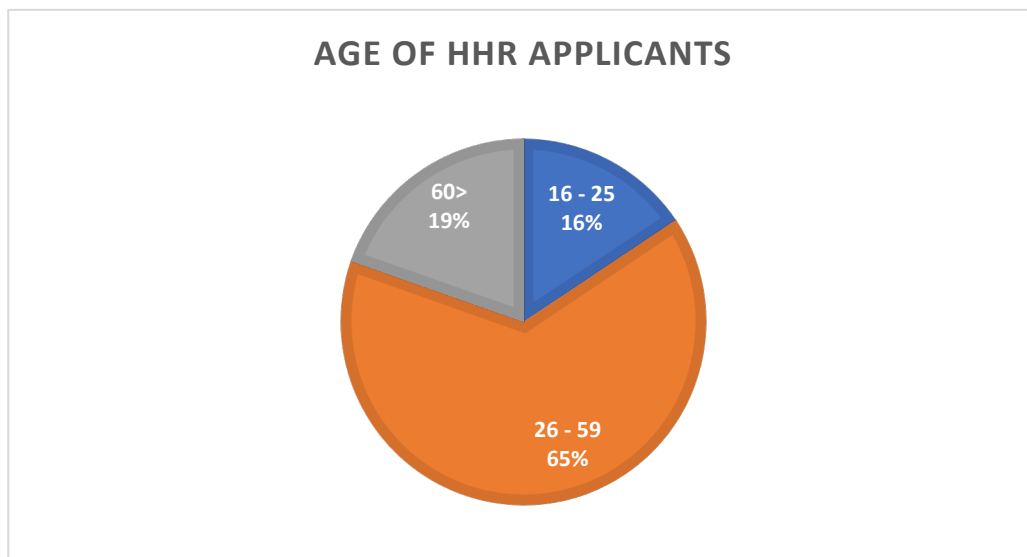
*Applications counted in their '1<sup>st</sup> preference' area, not holding office. Some applications incomplete pending this detail*

Area	1	%	2	%	3	%	4	%	5+	%	Apps/ stock
Badenoch& Strathspey	443	63%	117	17%	102	14%	36	5%	8	1%	706
Available Stock	242	27%	456	51%	173	19%	19	2%	5	1%	895
Caithness	637	67%	127	19%	48	7%	29	4%	12	2%	653
Available Stock	738	27%	1,149	41%	766	28%	117	4%	4	>1%	2,774
Inverness	2,170	58%	873	23%	469	13%	170	5%	59	1%	3,741
Available Stock	1,851	29%	2,765	43%	1,591	25%	153	2%	10	>1%	6,370
Lochaber	713	59%	290	24%	133	11%	46	4%	16	1%	1,197
Available Stock	219	11%	1100	54%	645	32%	63	3%	1	>1%	2,028
Nairn	263	57%	98	21%	63	14%	24	5%	10	2%	458
Available Stock	317	33%	389	40%	231	24%	31	3%	5	1%	973
Ross& Cromarty	1,147	58%	467	24%	234	12%	88	4%	33	2%	1,969
Available Stock	1,017	19%	2,076	40%	1,879	36%	208	4%	40	>1%	5,220
Skye& Lochalsh	401	70%	99	17%	51	9%	16	3%	6	1%	573
Available Stock	296	26%	481	42%	332	28%	37	1%	2	>1%	1,138
Sutherland	210	64%	65	20%	37	11%	9	3%	5	2%	326
Available Stock	350	32%	415	38%	332	30%	6	1%	2	>1%	1105
<b>Highland</b>	<b>5,783</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>2,136</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>1,137</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>9,624</b>
<b>Available Stock</b>	<b>5,030</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>8,831</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>5,940</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>634</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>&gt;1%</b>	<b>20,503</b>

2.9 Chart 2 illustrates the different age groups of HHR applicants. The bulk of applicants are aged between 25 and 60 (65%) with 1 in 5 applicants (19%) aged over 60 years. This is a drop from 22% in 2019-20.

**Chart 2 – Age of HHR applicants**





2.10 Table 2 focuses on the current circumstances of young applicants. Young applicants aged 16-25 are far more likely than other age groups to be in homeless accommodation/Homeless at Home (18% of young applicants). Housing applicants who require a one-bedroom property will continue to be a priority in order to rapidly re-house single homeless households who on average spend more time in homeless accommodation, but this is limited by the number of one-bedroom properties available to let.

**Table 2 - Applicants Aged 16-25 Showing Current Circumstances**

Current Tenure	Couple	Family	Single	Total	%
Living with parents/relatives/	103	118	440	<b>661</b>	45
Temporary homeless accommodation	45	22	161	<b>228</b>	16
A tenant of an HHR landlord	14	125	42	<b>181</b>	12
Tenant of private landlord	28	57	56	<b>141</b>	10
Living or lodging with friends	5	10	59	<b>75</b>	5
Homeless at home	4	8	32	<b>44</b>	3
Hostel / supported accommodation		1	30	<b>31</b>	2
Other housing association / council	7	20	16	<b>43</b>	3
Residential care/throughcare	2	2	9	<b>13</b>	1
Tied tenant	2	1	8	<b>12</b>	1
Tenant of a property leased by council	3	6	3	<b>12</b>	1
Living in caravan	1	1	4	<b>6</b>	>1
Long term stays in hospital		1	5	<b>6</b>	>1
Owner occupier/shared owner	1	2	2	<b>5</b>	>1
Prison			1	<b>1</b>	>1
<b>Total Each Household Type 16-25yrs</b>	191	398	877	<b>1,466</b>	100
<b>Percentage of Household Type</b>	13	27	60	100	

2.11 Many applicants expressed an interest in alternative re-housing options. These options may present a better opportunity to access housing in a preferred community. There is value in assisting applicants with accessing these options and assessing outcomes.

- 2.12 HHR Partner staff have recently undertaken Mid-Market Rent and Low-Cost Home Ownership training and have had increased awareness of these options. Housing staff are expected to be better informed and more able to assist applicants in applying for these options. This awareness rising and training will continue.

**Table 3 – Alternative housing options**

Alternative Housing Options	No. Applicants Expressing Interest
Mutual exchange	1,754
Mid-market rent (MMR)	2,022
Renting a private property	1,970
Buying a house or flat (e.g. via Low Cost Home Own)	588
Building own home with a rural home ownership grant	532
Having home adapted to meet your daily living needs	346

- 2.13 In 2020-21, 176 applications were suspended from receiving offers – an increase from 150 in 2019-20. Of these cases, 88 were a result of the applicant owing arrears to an HHR landlord and failing to maintain a reasonable repayment arrangement and 11 applicants had refused two reasonable offers of housing.

### Pressures Across Highland

- 2.14 Table 4 below indicates relative pressure on housing by illustrating how many '1<sup>st</sup> choice' applicants there are for each house let. It shows that the pressure in Badenoch & Strathspey, Inverness, Mid and West Ross and Lochaber is greater than the Highland average. In Lochaber, for every let, there are 14 applicants compared to a Highland average of 7 applicants per let.

- 2.15 Despite some area variations these figures represent an overall increase in housing pressure.

**Table 4 - Relative Pressure – 1<sup>st</sup> Choice HHR Applicants per HHR Let 2020-21**

Area	Lets During Year	1 <sup>st</sup> Choice applicants*	Pressure – applicants per let
Badenoch & Strathspey	58	706	12.2
Caithness	252	653	2.6
Inverness	380	3,741	9.8
Lochaber	86	1,197	13.9
Nairn	83	458	5.5
East Ross	136	813	6.0
Mid Ross	82	910	11.1
West Ross	32	246	7.7
Skye & Lochalsh	98	573	5.8
Sutherland	93	326	3.5
<b>Highland</b>	<b>1,300**</b>	<b>9,624</b>	<b>7.4</b>

\*Note – a small number of applications were incomplete and pending detail

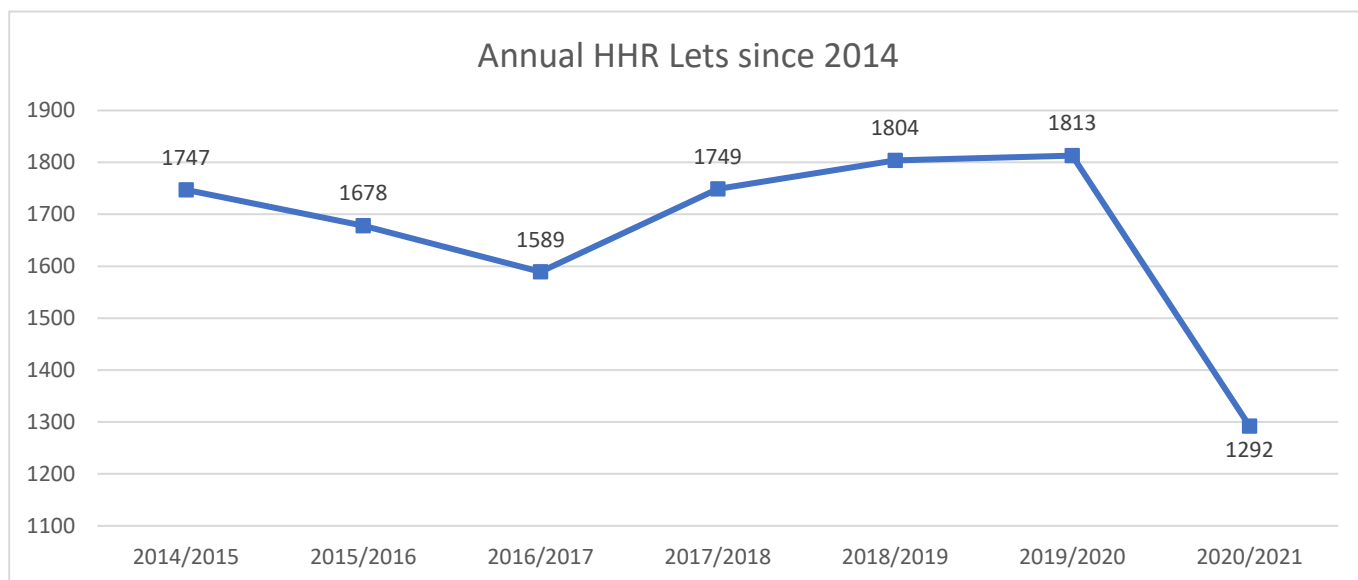
\*\* includes HHR participating landlords

## 3 Allocations

- 3.1 There has been a significant decrease in letting activity. In total, 1,292 households were given a new home via the HHR (a decrease from 1,813 in 2019-20). The decrease can be directly linked to Covid-19 restrictions which paused allocations and increased re-let times.

3.2 Chart 3 shows that the long-term trend of HHR lets is increasing as a result of the new build development programme. This also enables HHR partners to provide more affordable, quality self-contained temporary accommodation for those who find themselves homeless. Temporary lets are **not** reflected in Chart 3.

**Chart 3 – Annual HHR lets since 2014**



3.3 Mutual Exchanges can help tenants to meet their needs and aspirations to move (especially if their points are low). 83 households used this method to move into an HHR tenancy (either from within Highland or out with). This compares to 178 exchanges in the previous year. Most were in Inverness followed by Alness. Again, the decrease was primarily a consequence of Covid-19 restrictions.

3.4 Following consultation with tenants, The HHR partners have developed a new and shared Mutual Exchange policy aimed at targeting people who are in urgent need of housing more fairly, acting lawfully in line with the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 and responding to the changing needs of the Highlands. The policy can be found in **Appendix 2** of this report. The HHR partners are seeking approval of this policy.

3.5 Looking at demand alongside supply illustrates the different pressures across Highland. Table 5 shows that whilst around 4 out of 10 (39%) applicants are seeking housing in Inverness, the lack of supply means that less than 3 out of 10 (29%) lets are made in Inverness. This contrasts with Caithness which accounts for nearly 19% of Highland lets but only 7% of applicants.

**Table 5 - Households Applying to Live in an Area Compared to Lets 2020-21**

	Applicants*	Percentage of Applicants	Lets	Percentage of Lets
<b>Badenoch &amp; Strathspey</b>	706	7%	58	4%
<b>Caithness</b>	653	7%	252	19%
<b>Inverness</b>	3,741	39%	380	29%
<b>Lochaber</b>	1,197	12%	86	7%
<b>Nairn</b>	458	5%	83	6%
<b>East Ross</b>	813	8%	136	10%
<b>Mid Ross</b>	910	9%	82	6%

<b>West Ross</b>	246	3%	32	2%
<b>Skye &amp; Lochalsh</b>	573	6%	98	8%
<b>Sutherland</b>	326	3%	93	7%
<b>Highland</b>	9,624	100%	1,300**	100%

Note – a small number of applications were incomplete and pending detail

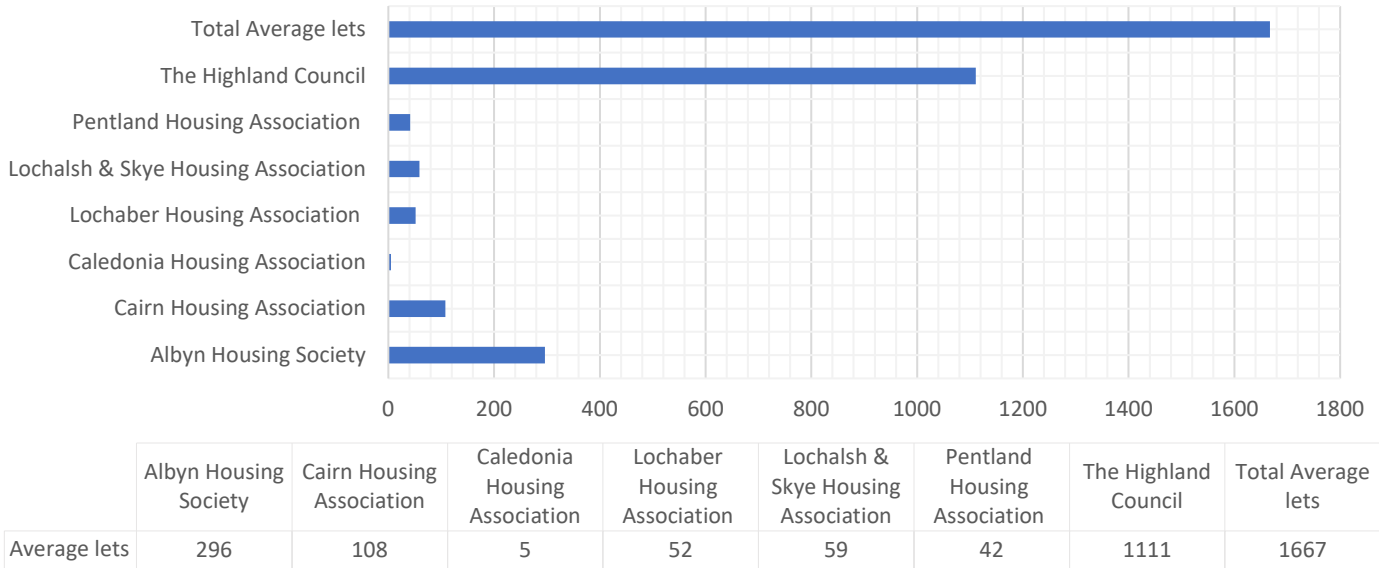
\*\* includes HHR participating landlords

3.6

Chart 4 illustrates the trend in HHR lets by each landlord. Fluctuations are likely mainly due to impact of new builds.

**Chart 4 – Annual lets per landlord 2014/15 – 2020/21\***

Average Annual Lets per landlord 2014/2015 - 2020/2021

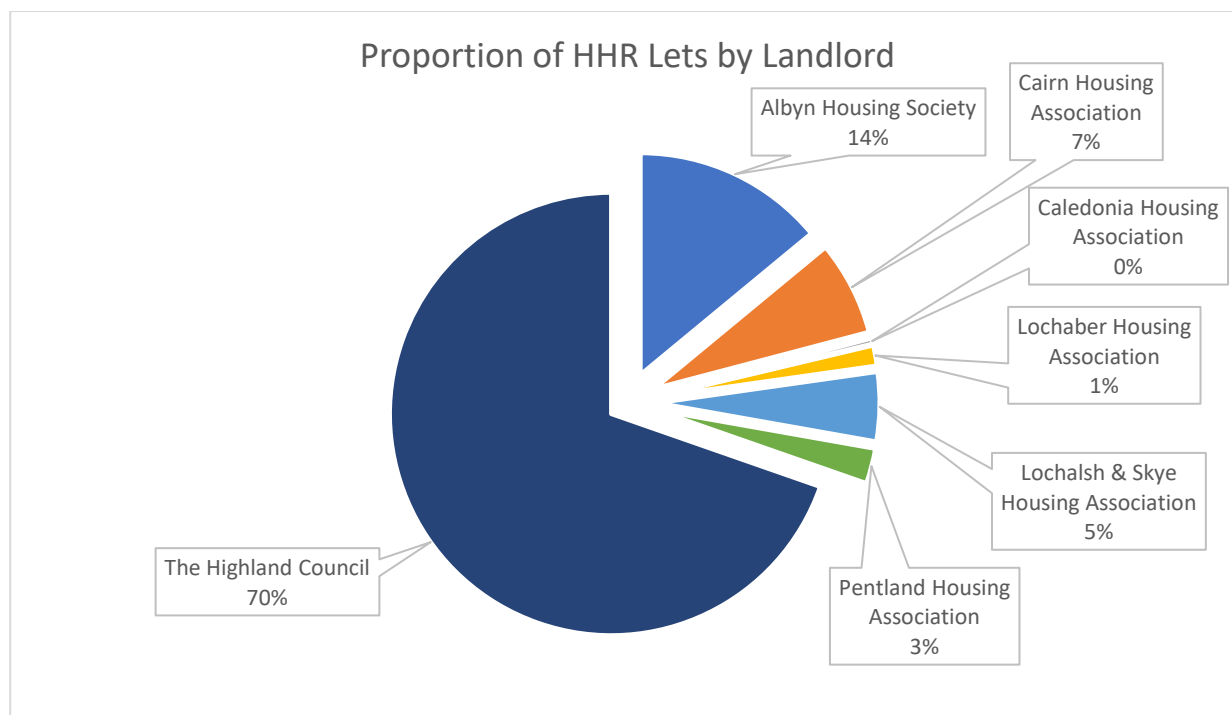


\*No five-year average exits for Caledonia because they began allocating in 2020/2021

3.7

Chart 5 shows the proportion of applicants housed by individual HHR Partners. These have generally been consistent in recent years but in 2020-21 the Council's proportion increased from 62% to 70%. This reflects the Council's priority in allocating homeless applicants during the pandemic.

**Chart 5 – Proportion of HHR lets by landlord 2020-21**



3.8 Participating landlords (Trust Housing, Link Housing, Blackwood Homes, Abbeyfield Hanover Housing and Key Housing) have around 750 social rented properties in Highland. Whilst these landlords may seek nominations from the Highland Housing Register (HHR), several hold their own lists which they allocate directly from. HHR officers are encouraged to assist applicants to apply direct to these. In 2020/21, 8 HHR applicants were housed by these landlords via HHR nominations.

3.9 Allocating housing to a transferring tenant is a useful tool for freeing up family housing or single person 'starter' housing. Across Highland, the trends in this split were maintained with the majority of lets to those on the Housing List (74%, 953) and just over a quarter (26%, 339) going to transferring tenants.

3.10 The Thurso area undertook most Housing List allocations at 82% while Dingwall was least with 66%. Similar to last year, the Thurso, Alness, Sutherland and Wick areas remained the highest Housing List allocators while Lochaber and Nairn saw a 10% and 12% decrease.

### **Homelessness**

3.11 Social housing landlord are legally required to give reasonable preference to households who have particular needs including those in greatest housing need. Table 6 shows to the extent to which allocations met urgent needs arising from homelessness. It also illustrates that other needs applicants are being met as well as homelessness.

3.12 Homelessness is continuing to increase. Table 6 gives a snapshot of the number of households in each area who have points reflecting that they have no-where safe and secure that they can reasonably stay. With 920 households having this status, this represents a continuing increase (794 last year). The vast majority (791 households) are living in temporary homeless accommodation provided by the Council. In Over 100 households are classed as 'homeless at home'.

3.13 The percentage split between non-homeless and homeless applicants housed on the Housing List increased for homeless applicants. 62% of all Housing List allocations went to homeless applicants, an increase from 54%. This trend will need to continue if the Council, with its partners, is to reduce temporary accommodation / homeless waiting times and rapidly re-house households into secure, stable and affordable housing.

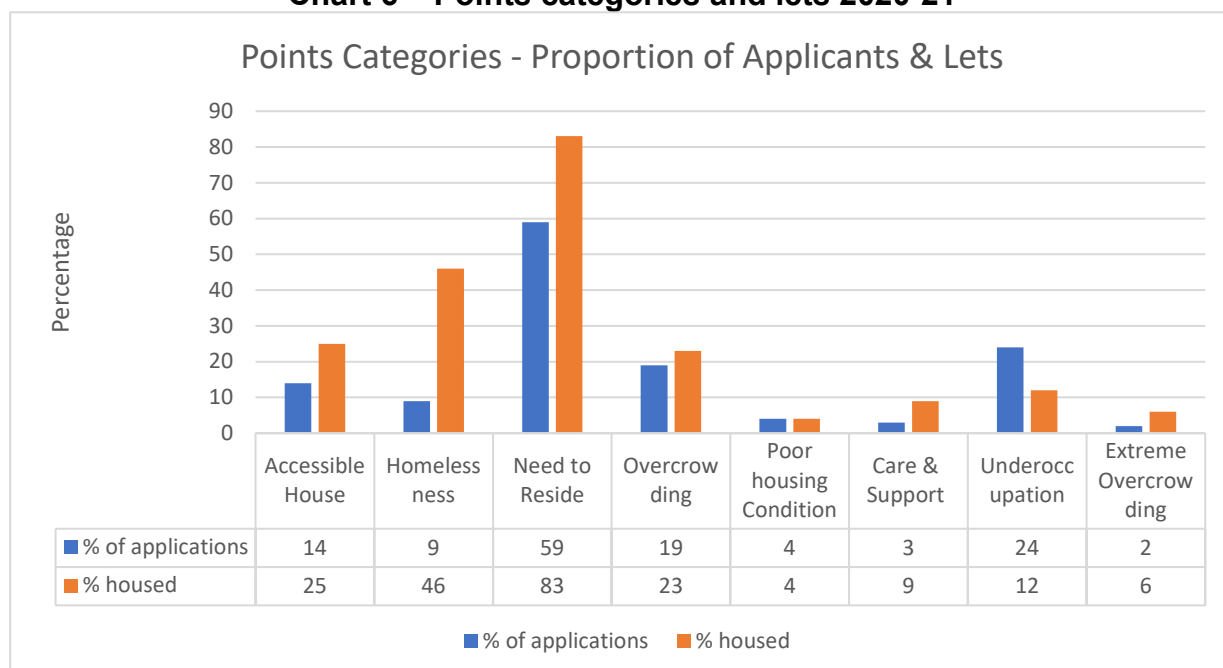
**Table 6 – HHR Homeless Lets as a Percentage of All (and Housing List applicant) Lets**

Area	Number of Apps with Homeless Points	Per-centage of Housing List Apps	All HHR Lets 20-21	Let's to Homeless Households		
				No. of Lets to Apps with Homeless Points	Percentage of Housing & Transfer Lets	Percentage of Housing List Lets only
<b>Badenoch &amp; Strathspey</b>	46	8%	58	34	59%	72%
<b>Caithness</b>	11	3%	252	58	23%	31%
<b>Inverness</b>	431	16%	380	211	56%	78%
<b>Lochaber</b>	94	10%	86	44	51%	69%
<b>Nairn</b>	35	11%	83	44	53%	79%
<b>East Ross</b>	86	18%	136	70	51%	69%
<b>West Ross</b>	11	5%	32	11	34%	42%
<b>Mid Ross</b>	122	19%	82	39	48%	74%
<b>Skye &amp; Lochalsh</b>	73	16%	98	64	65%	79%
<b>Sutherland</b>	11	4%	93	20	22%	27%
<b>Total</b>	<b>920</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>1,300</b>	<b>595</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>62%</b>

3.14 Detailed analysis shows that all the HHR landlords play a very important and equally significant role in meeting the needs of households are homeless. The proportion of lets by each landlord in the different areas to homeless households is broadly similar. Where there are variations this is likely due to size e.g. some have higher proportions of 1 bed housing.

3.15 Chart 6 shows the percentage of applicants awarded points for the various housing need categories set out in the HHR Allocation Policy compared to the percentage housed with these points. It shows, in line with HHR Policy objectives, that generally applicants who, due to their circumstances, have the greatest need for re-housing are more likely to be housed.

**Chart 6 – Points categories and lets 2020-21**



- 3.16 Across Highland, over 8 out of 10 of those housed had additional points which recognised their 'need to reside' in the community where they were housed. This is because they already live or work there or because they are giving or receiving care and support there (e.g. from family). In areas with more pressure on its housing (i.e. far more applicants than supply), a greater proportion of lets went to those with these points. For example, in Badenoch and Strathspey, Inverness and Lochaber, 97% of all housed applicants had 'need to reside' points.
- 3.17 This demonstrates that HHR policy is able to prioritise allocations to applicants with a Need to Reside in a community over those who do not have this.
- 3.18 The Highlands supports the Armed Forces including through the Covenant which recognises their particular needs. Currently there are 25 applications with serving members and 9 applications with former members of the British Armed Forces.
- 3.19 To make sure that there is equality of access we monitor equalities issues. Whilst these questions are not compulsory, responses to these questions have increased. Table 7 shows that 3 out of 4 applicants who completed the form describe themselves as Scottish: 2,883 (76%) applicants and 347 (74%) housed applicants which represents very little change from last year. White British & Irish (13%) and all Other White applicants (8.6%) are the next largest groups.

**Table 7 - HHR Demand and Lets by Ethnic Origin**

<b>Ethnic Origin*</b>	<b>Applications**</b>	<b>Housed Applicants</b>
(i) (a) White Scottish	2883	347
(i) (b) White Other British / Irish	470	78
(i) (d) White Gypsy/Traveller	4	1
(i) (e) White Polish	135	14
(i) (f) White Other	211	15
(ii) Mixed or Multiple Ethnic	16	4
Other Non-white	71	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,790</b>	<b>467</b>

\* Other Non-White is broken down into several categories but individually are less than a percentage

\*\* Note that not all applicants provide this information

- 3.20 To ensure equality, information on applicants identifying as disabled is monitored. The Policy appears to be meeting such needs with a greater proportion of disabled applicants being housed than applying for housing (18% of lets and 15% of all applicants are disabled – 1,513 applicants and 214 lets). This should be expected as disabled households are more likely to have high points mainly due to Accessible Housing and Care & Support.
- 3.21 Properties are regularly adapted in order to meet a disabled applicants housing need which enables them to remain in their home. This in turn relieves pressure on the HHR and ensures lets to accessible housing go to those who are unable to resolve their housing need it through adaptations.
- 3.22 The proportion of adapted stock can be increased through proactive approaches in new build development and by adapting existing stock while they are voids.

## 4 Particular Housing Needs

- 4.1 As well as approaches directly from applicants, HHR partners have a range of competing policy priorities to balance. 28 households were helped to move into their 1<sup>st</sup> independent living tenancy, most through the protocol with NHS Highland for people with complex care and support needs. 17 young people were housed in their first tenancy through the Care Leavers Protocol - most, 11, were housed in Inverness.

- 4.2 Table 8 shows the number of applicants who require 'wheelchair-user' housing or 'level access' housing (i.e. housing on one level which is suitable for people with significant mobility needs). The table also shows how many of those properties were let over the year. It highlights that there is a relatively large unmet need - over 100 applicants require housing suitable for wheelchair users. Half have an urgent need to move from very unsuitable housing.
- 4.3 Across Highland, 17 households who required wheelchair housing had their needs met. A number of these properties were newly built. Across Highland, the proportion of lets to wheelchair housing generally reflected the proportion of this type of demand in an area.
- 4.4 Many households with mobility needs are waiting to be housed more suitably in 'level access' housing – 723 applicants across Highland (7.5% of all applicants). This proportion is higher at just over 10% of applicants in East and Mid Ross with Caithness, Nairn and West Ross also being above 7.5%. On average 11.1% of lets went to applicants who required level access housing – this proportion was highest in Nairn at 19.3% and Mid-Ross (17.1%), West Ross (15.6%), Inverness (14.2%) and Sutherland (14%) are all higher. This reflects stock availability and may be affected by new build activity (rather than on-going turnover).

**Table 8 - Demand & Lets for Wheelchair & Level Access Housing**

	<b>Apps Requiring Wheelchair housing</b>	<b>Lets to Wheelchair applicants</b>	<b>Apps Requiring Level Access</b>	<b>Lets to Apps Requiring Level Access</b>
<b>Badenoch &amp; Strath.</b>	5	0	36	5
<b>Caithness</b>	5	1	51	15
<b>Inverness</b>	43	9	252	54
<b>Lochaber</b>	19	0	83	6
<b>Nairn</b>	9	2	39	16
<b>East Ross</b>	20	3	97	13
<b>Mid Ross</b>	17	1	96	14
<b>West Ross</b>	3	1	18	5
<b>Skye &amp; Lochalsh</b>	3	0	30	3
<b>Sutherland</b>	3	0	21	13
<b>Highland</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>723</b>	<b>144</b>

*Live & suspended applicants – applicants only counted once.*

- 4.5 There are many applicants who require specialist design features who have a long term unresolved urgent need to move. Figures highlight that ongoing investment in specially designed housing is required. Much of this demand is in the Inner Moray Firth where costs are severely restricting new supply.
- 4.6 This demand will continue to be unmet unless proactive approaches are made to overcome supply issues. For example, by encouraging tenants of adapted properties to transfer to another property when no household members require the specialist features; being more proactive in assessing void properties for adaptations and ensuring the best mix of property types in new build developments. Area based analysis should be adopted to assist in identifying where demand is most and what property types are needed. This can be supplemented through individual property purchase in line with existing policy.



- 4.7 There have been 60 lets into the Council's sheltered housing - 23% were HHR transferring tenants; 31% homeless lets and 45% were off the waiting list. Sheltered housing continues to play an important role in helping people with mobility or other health needs whose current housing is unsuitable is clear - 8 out of 10 sheltered housing lets were to applicants with 'accessible housing' (i.e. health / medical rehousing priority) points. Of the 60 lets, 11 households had an urgent need to move due to their health-related housing issues. Good communication and joint working arrangements with local health and social care teams can help to make sure that sheltered housing is best used to meet individuals and communities needs and relieve pressures on other services.
- 4.7 Analysis suggests that there would be value in ensuring that the Allocation Policy prioritises households who have few options and need help to secure housing which is suitable for their health or mobility needs. The increase in alternative options including low cost ownership may provide greater opportunities for households whose needs are changing as they age.

## 5 **Conclusion**

- 5.1 It has been a challenging year for the HHR and its landlords. Covid-19 has brought about large changes to working practices and reduced our ability to allocate. However, the annual report indicates that the HHR is still performing well in meeting housing need and continues to play an important role in supporting good health, strong communities and local economies.
- 5.2 The HHR policy review currently under way will ensure the HHR continues to support those with unmet housing need across Highland and address some of the particular challenges highlighted in this report.

Author: Aodhan Byrne,  
Housing Policy Officer

Date: 25 May 2021