HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: **Housing and Property**

Date: **10 June 2021**

Report Title: **Homelessness and Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan**

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

1   Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1   This report provides an update on: -

- Actions that the Council is taking to implement our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan; and
- Progress in response to new legislation in relation to the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004.

2   Recommendations

2.1   Members are invited to: -

    i. **Note** progress on the Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and actions undertaken to mitigate homelessness in Highland.
   ii. **Approve** the Annual Update of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan attached as **Appendix 1** for submission to Scottish Government.

3   Implications

3.1   **Resources** – The Council has received funding of £929k since 2018/19 from the Scottish Government in relation to delivering additional services to implement our Rapid Rehousing approach to homelessness.

3.2   **Legal** – A review of homelessness policy is underway to bring current policy up to date in relation to changes to legislation and guidance. A further report on policy will be provided to Committee following Scottish Government confirmation of changes nationally.

3.3   **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)** - Although case numbers are concentrated in Inverness there are also complex challenges in rural communities. As set out in the Plan if rapid rehousing of homeless applicants is prioritised and a higher proportion of housing allocations are made to homeless applicants a lower proportion will be made to other housing needs groups, including people with medical issues. A full Equality Impact Assessment was completed in June 2019.

3.4   **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** - There are no implications arising from this report.

3.5   **Risk** - There are financial and regulatory risks associated with changes to homelessness policy and practice which require to be managed during implementation.

3.6   **Gaelic** - There are no implications arising from the report.

4   **Policy Background and national policy objectives**

4.1   The Programme for Government announced by the First Minister on 5 September 2017 set out a new commitment to eradicate rough sleeping, transform the use of temporary accommodation in Scotland and end homelessness. Ministers subsequently established the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) to make recommendations on how these transformational changes could be achieved.

4.2   In response to the recommendations made by the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) published the "Ending Homelessness Together" action plan in November 2018. This included the recommendation that all local authorities produce Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans to document how they would tackle homelessness.

4.3   Where homelessness cannot be prevented, Rapid Rehousing is defined as follows: -

- a settled, mainstream housing outcome as quickly as possible;
- time spent in any form of temporary accommodation reduced to a minimum, with the fewer transitions the better; and
- when temporary accommodation is needed, the optimum type is mainstream, furnished and within a community.

4.4   For clients with multiple and complex support needs beyond housing, a Housing First model is recommended. Housing First is based on the following premises:

- housing is a basic human right, not a reward for an applicant demonstrating that they are ready and able to sustain a secure tenancy; and
- once the chaos of homelessness is eliminated from a person's life stabilisation occurs faster and is more enduring.

4.5   In response to the Covid-19 emergency the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group was reconvened on a "short-life" basis and provided a further report and recommendations on transforming homeless services and ending homelessness in Scotland. These were accepted in principle by Ministers and should be considered when revising Rapid Rehousing Transitions Plans. The full report containing all 105 recommendations can be found here: -
https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/corporate-report/2020/07/homelessness-and-rough-sleeping-action-group-final-report-tackling-coronavirus/documents/harsag-final-report-on-homelessness-after-coronavirus/harsag-final-report-on-homelessness-after-coronavirus/govscot%3Adocument/HARSAG%2BCovid%2Bfinal%2Breport.pdf

4.6   The Council is experiencing very significant pressures in relation to homelessness. A service that was already stretched in terms of case numbers and faced with housing demand far exceeding available supply has been placed under additional stress as a result of Covid-19. It is also widely predicted that there will be an increase in homelessness nationally as we move beyond the emergency response to Covid-19.

4.7   Details of homelessness presentations and the number of clients in temporary accommodation are included in the Housing Performance Report and Highland Housing Register reports to this Committee. Table 1 below demonstrates the number of homelessness presentations in the last two financial years. Table 2 below provides details of the numbers of HHR applicants per area who have homeless points and the number of HHR lets in 2020/21 to applicants with homeless points.

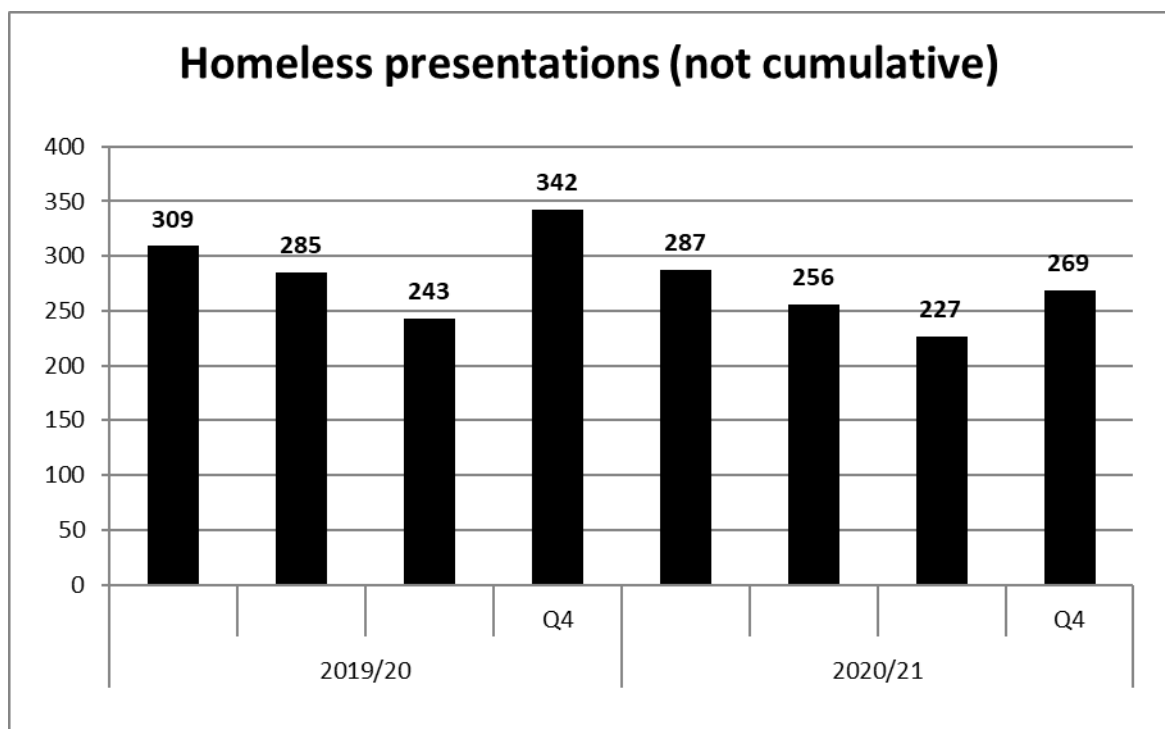*Table 1 - Homeless presentations per quarter (not cumulative)*

Table 2 – Percentage of lets to homeless households

Area	All HHR Lets 20-21	No. of Lets to Apps with Homeless Points	% of Housing & Transfer Lets	% of Housing List Lets only
Badenoch & Strathspey	58	34	59%	72%
Caithness	252	58	23%	31%
Inverness	380	211	56%	78%
Lochaber	86	44	51%	69%
Nairn	83	44	53%	79%
East Ross	136	70	51%	69%
West Ross	32	11	34%	42%
Mid Ross	82	39	48%	74%
Skye& Lochalsh	98	64	65%	79%
Sutherland	93	20	22%	27%
Total	**1,300**	**595**	**46%**	**62%**

5. Highland Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP)

5.1 Following approval by the Care, Learning and Housing Committee the Council's current Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan was submitted to The Scottish Government in April 2019. An updated Plan was submitted to The Scottish Government in June 2020 and the 2021 update is scheduled to be submitted by 30 June 2021.

5.2 The draft 2021 RRTP is attached as **Appendix 1**. There are 3 main workstreams for which specific funding has been provided by the Scottish Government. These are described below.

6 Rapid Rehousing Officers

6.1 Three specialist housing officers have been recruited to work with homeless applicants who have been in temporary accommodation the longest or have the most complex needs to identify the barriers preventing them from obtaining a permanent outcome to their homelessness. They work with key partners to address any unmet needs that have been identified. Scottish Government Funding of **£113,843** has been received for this.

6.2 These posts have a specific focus on taking on caseload responsibility for complex homeless service users Highland wide. These service users have complex needs involving issues such as self-harm; significant drug and alcohol misuse; mental health issues both diagnosed and undiagnosed; and repeat criminal behavior subject to community-based justice restrictions.

6.3 The case holders engage creatively and positively with these service users and key partners in respect of any unmet needs which might prevent these service users from sustaining a tenancy successfully. In addition to the development of closer working partnerships with key partners in NHS Highland, the year 1 target for these posts is the creation and sustainment of secure tenancies for 20 homeless service users with complex needs.

7 Housing First

7.1 The Highland Alcohol and Drug Partnership (HADP) received separate Scottish Government funding distributed through NHS for its Housing First project. They have entered into a partnership agreement with Highland Council and NHS Highland to develop and implement a Housing First project in the Inner Moray Firth focused on clients who are homeless or at risk of homelessness due to harmful and significant drug and/ or alcohol use.

7.2 Housing First tenancies in Highland have been in place for almost a year now and currently provide accommodation for 10 service users. The current target is that the project will house 15 homeless service users each year through a Housing First tenancy outcome in the Inner Moray Firth.

7.3 Referral, monitoring and evaluation arrangements have been developed within our Housing First Pathway which has been developed in partnership with colleagues in the NHS and the Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (HAPD). The Pathway has a specific focus on Harm Reduction reflecting the funding received from HADP.

7.4 Since our Housing First Team's operational implementation in 2020, 10 Housing First tenancies created have been sustained successfully with the delivery of person-centered, multi-agency support packages. Through the duration of these tenancies there have been no rent arrears accrued and no antisocial behavior complaints have been received. Our Housing First tenants have shown a marked increase in positive engagement with Health and Social Care partners with much reduced rates of overdose and reduced negative interactions with the criminal justice system.

7.5 A formal evaluation is being carried out with HADP colleagues to evaluate the approach further and inform a wider roll-out. A Housing First Steering Group has been established as a subgroup of the HADP to progress the development of the approach with key partners in Highland and reach wider categories of complex need as well as more geographical parts of Highland. Discussions are currently ongoing with colleagues and key partners to develop a Housing First pathway for Care Experienced young people and to trial Housing First in Skye as a rural pilot of the approach.

8 Shared Tenancies

8.1 The use of shared temporary accommodation is an effective model of accommodation to assist the Council in meeting the new regulations in regard to unsuitable accommodation. The Scottish Government has adopted most of Highland's shared tenancy processes and standards of accommodation as part of their national guidance for local authorities.

8.2 To date the Council has established 26 shared properties as detailed in the table below, allowing for 52 clients.

Table 3 – Shared tenancy properties in Highland as at 4 May 2021

Area	Number of tenancies
Inverness	18
Ross & Cromarty	6
Nairn	1
Fort William	1
Total	**26**

8.3 The model has proved effective and has been popular with service users in terms of affordability, quality of accommodation and peer support which both sharers can potentially benefit from. In regard to affordability, an average weekly rent in TFA Share is £64.

8.4 There has also been positive evidence of improved tenancy-related behaviour in the shared tenancy model. Over the past 6 months the Council has received only 5 anti-social behaviour complaints from neighbours of TFA share properties. 4 of these complaints were resolved quickly through informal advice and guidance with the 1 other complaint being resolved through identifying an alternative sharing tenant through our matching processes.

8.5 One lesson from the trial is that higher levels of management input are needed to manage shared tenancies effectively. Scottish Government Funding of **£166,157** has allowed a dedicated Shared Temporary Furnished Accommodation (TFA) Team to be established to manage an increase in property numbers.

8.6 The Shared TFA Team is working to scale up our stock of shared temporary accommodation. As detailed in section 9 below, this will assist Highland in compliance with the new Unsuitable Accommodation Order and help minimise the use of B&B-type temporary accommodation which is currently procured from the Private Rented Sector.

8.7 The TFA Share Team's target for 2021/22 is to create an additional 50 TFA Share units to allow us to end our use of Unsuitable Accommodation for single homeless applicants.

9 Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004

9.1 The previous "Unsuitable Accommodation Order" dictated that 'bed and breakfast-type' accommodation must not be used for more than 7 days (in total) for any homeless households which contain children or pregnant women. The Scottish Government extended the Order to all homeless households from 30 September 2020.

9.2   Prior to the extension, there were no breaches of the Order in Highland during 2019-20. However, the extension refers to all homeless applicants hence resulting in the Order applying to an additional **850** households per year (previously it only applied to around 300 households with children / pregnant women).

9.3   During the Covid-19 pandemic, The Scottish Government approved exemptions to the Order until 30 June 2021. These temporary exemptions can be applied to single homeless households but not to homeless households containing pregnant women or children. At 4 May 2021 we had a total of 30 cases where single homeless clients were placed in 'unsuitable' temporary accommodation, across Inverness, Ross and Cromarty and Lochaber. These are classified as temporary exemptions under the coronavirus legislation. The numbers reflect specific issues in parts of Highland with historic reliance on B&B / HMO-type accommodation which is now deemed unsuitable under the extended Order.

9.4   In response to the challenges of the extended Order, the Council has been increasing its stock of self-contained temporary accommodation. Table 6 below shows the current position compared to the previous 3 years.

Table 6 – Type of temporary accommodation

Accommodation Type	May-18	May-19	May-20	May-21
Council-owned Temporary Furbished Accommodation	227	305	377	431
Council Owned TFA Share	8	17	10	26
Leasing Scheme Properties	151	152	162	185
Framework B&B / HMO	226	217	189	166

10   Homeless Prevention

10.1   The Scottish Government has set up a Prevention Review Group (PRG) to make recommendations on a statutory Homeless Prevention duty in Scotland. The PRG published its recommendations in February this year and these are now with the Scottish Government for consideration. The PRG's recommendations can be found at: preventing-homelessness-in-scotland.pdf (crisis.org.uk)

10.2   Once the exact detail of this new Homeless Prevention Duty is known we will develop our Homeless Prevention approach with key partners. One of the essential elements to our Prevention approach will be around closer working arrangements with the Private Rented Sector. The Council previously worked with Crisis in 2019 to survey the PRS in respect of its willingness to work with the Council on our homeless pressures. The consultation results were encouraging and reported previously to Committee.

10.3 We are currently in the process of recruiting a Private Rented Sector (PRS) / Empty Homes Liaison Officer which is a match-funded post with Shelter Scotland. The Officer will develop a new PRS strategy and a closer working relationship with the sector to support private tenants and landlords in sustaining tenancies.

10.4 Work with the private rented sector is particularly important given the potential increase in evictions from private tenancies when Covid-19 restrictions are eased. The Officer will be tasked with bringing a minimum of 10 empty private sector homes back into use in 2021-22.

11 Review of homelessness services

11.1 Changes to service structures will need to allow us to respond to a number of challenges in relation to homelessness. These are currently being developed as part of Housing and Property Service structures.

11.2 We will continue to consider how we organise and manage homelessness services to enable us to respond to the challenges we face.

11.3 We are also reviewing our policies, and procedures to enable compliance with the extended Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004 and proposed homelessness legislative changes such as changes to intentionality and local connection. The Scottish Government has also indicated that they intend to create a duty on public bodies to prevent homelessness and that this duty will be developed during 2021-22.

11.4 This review will also include the development of a Highland-wide Temporary Accommodation Register and a small 'Cloud Based' team to take a consistent approach to initial homeless presentations across Highland whilst carrying out an initial assessment of need and provision of Temporary Accommodation. This team will be developed from within existing resources.

11.5 Further reports will be presented to Committee on homelessness policy issues.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Housing & Property

Date: 28 May 2021

Authors: Brian Cameron, Housing Policy and Investment Manager
Lewis Hannah, Homeless Service Manager

Background Documents: Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Action Group Report;
Scottish Government Guidance on Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans;
Data returns of homelessness trends;
Background documents available at Rapid Rehousing

The Highland Council

Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan: 2019-2024

1.	**Introduction**

1.1 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) was established by the Scottish Government in October 2017. The Scottish Government accepted the majority of recommendations of the HARSAG in June 2018. This included the recommendation that all local authorities produce Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans to document how they will tackle homelessness.

1.2 The overall aim of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan is to set out the Council's approach to achieve rapid rehousing where homelessness cannot be prevented. Rapid rehousing is defined as:-

- Providing a settled, mainstream housing outcome as quickly as possible;
- Reducing time spent in any form of temporary accommodation to a minimum, with the fewer moves between temporary accommodation the better;
- When temporary accommodation is needed, the optimum type is mainstream, furnished and within a community.

1.3 For clients with multiple and complex support needs beyond housing, a Housing First model is recommended. Housing First is based on the following premises:-

- Housing is a basic human right, not a reward for clinical success; and
- Once the chaos of homelessness is eliminated from a person's life, clinical and social stabilisation will occur faster and be more enduring.

1.4 A Rapid Re-Housing Team will also play a role in supporting homeless clients with multiple and complex support needs into secure tenancies. The premise of this team is to
- Ensure speedy transition from homelessness into a secure tenancy; and
- Bring together partner support services to create a foundation for the service-user's tenancy
- Support the service-user's transition from homeless to mainstream tenancy management

1.5 This is the Council's third iteration of our 5-year Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and has been submitted for review by the Scottish Government, an Implementation Plan to accompany this document is being developed.   This RRTP and accompanying Implementation Plan will benefit from ongoing review.

2.	**Strategic Context**

2.1 The Council's Local Housing Strategy was approved in December 2017. The main objectives are:-

- Increase the supply of housing in Highland so that we have enough homes in the right places to meet housing needs-
- People are supported to live independently for as long as possible in their own homes and communities;
- Prevent and respond to homelessness and make sure people have the right help to let them make decisions on their housing options; and
- Improve the Quality and condition of the housing stock and minimise fuel poverty.

2.2 In relation to homelessness our strategic approach is:-

1. Prevent homelessness wherever possible;
2. Improve and increase access to housing advice and information services;
3. Enable access to the right type of housing;
4. Provide support to enable people to develop and maintain their capacity to live independently;
5. Ensure that housing support services focus on achieving positive outcomes and sustainable solutions for clients;
6. Work towards providing the majority of temporary accommodation in Council-owned properties;
7. Ensure rents in temporary accommodation are affordable for people on low incomes and within the welfare benefits system;
8. Reduce the time people spend in temporary accommodation;
9. Continue to implement a protocol on accommodation for looked after children to prevent homelessness;
10. Review partnership / interagency approaches to clients with complex needs;
11. Aim to minimise the use of large-scale HMO accommodation for younger single homeless clients;
12. Review the future options for temporary accommodation; and
13. Review and considering future specialist accommodation models linked to consideration of Housing First type approaches.

2.3 The Scottish Housing Regulator published a national report on its enquiry into housing options and homelessness prevention services in May 2014. The Scottish Government published national guidance on Housing Options on March 2016.

2.4 The Highland Council undertook a review of our homelessness services in 2014 to ensure that they:-

- are person centred and focussed on achieving outcomes that meet peoples' needs;
- prioritise early intervention and integrate prevention and homelessness assessment rather treat these as separate functions / activities;
- provide balanced and appropriate case specific advice and information;
- focus on a person's needs rather than the homelessness process; and
- identify and respond to support needs.

2.5 Further review is proposed later this year as part of our Service restructure which will focus on homeless service improvements required to meet the commitments

of this RRTP and well as emerging priorities from the legislative changes being implemented by the Scottish Government around Homeless Prevention and statutory homelessness.

2.6 The Council's Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2019-2024 was approved on 8 November 2018 and has been refreshed annually since then. The strategic targets for affordable housing provision contained in the SHIP tables are fully consistent with our current Local Housing Strategy targets of around 500 units per annum.

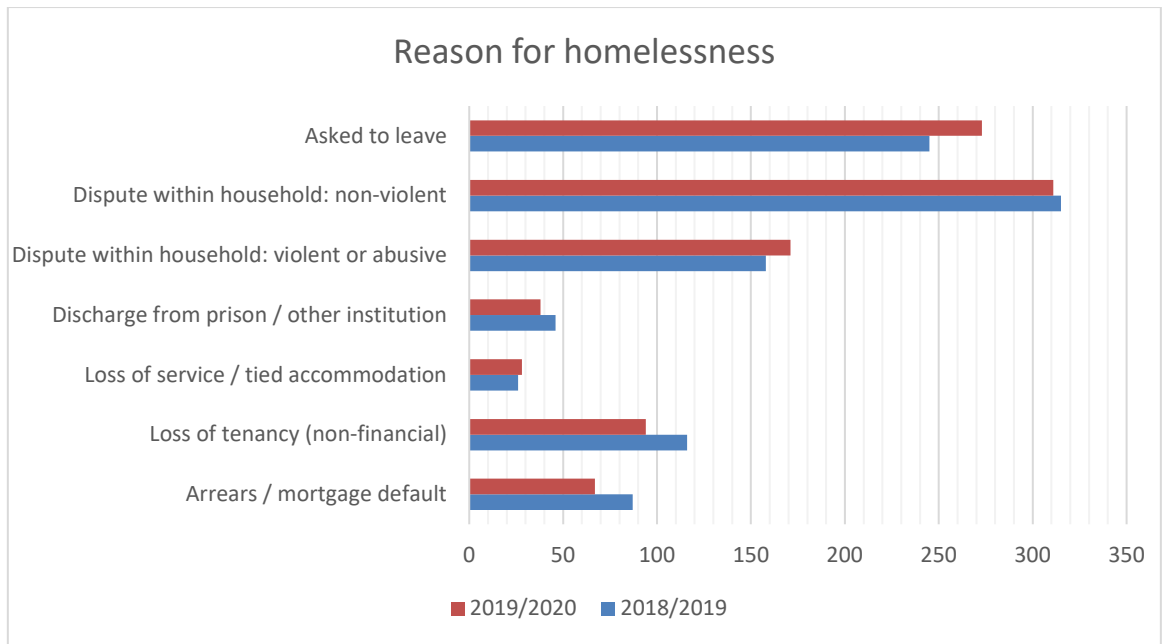## 3. A Profile of Homelessness in the Highlands

3.1 Since 2012/13 we have seen homeless applications at a relatively stable level of between 1,000 and 1,200 per year. There was notable increase in 2016/17 which has remained stable since.
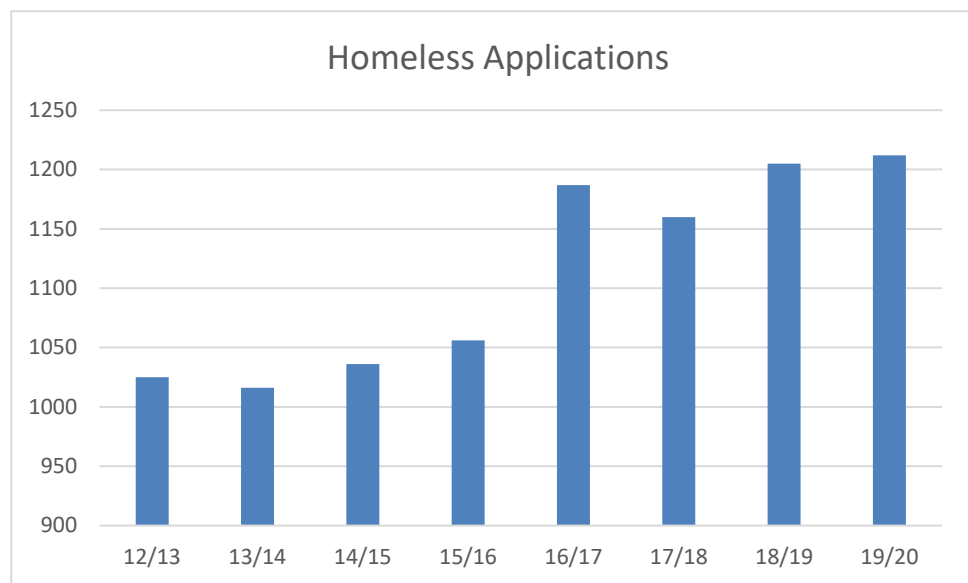
3.2 The age categories of homeless applicants have remained relatively stable since 2012/13. The single biggest group of homeless applicants are in the 26 – 59 years of age category and have accounted for around 63% of applicants on an annual basis. This compares to around 5% of applicants for the 16 - 17 years of age category, and 27% for the 18 – 25 years and 6% the 60+ years categories.
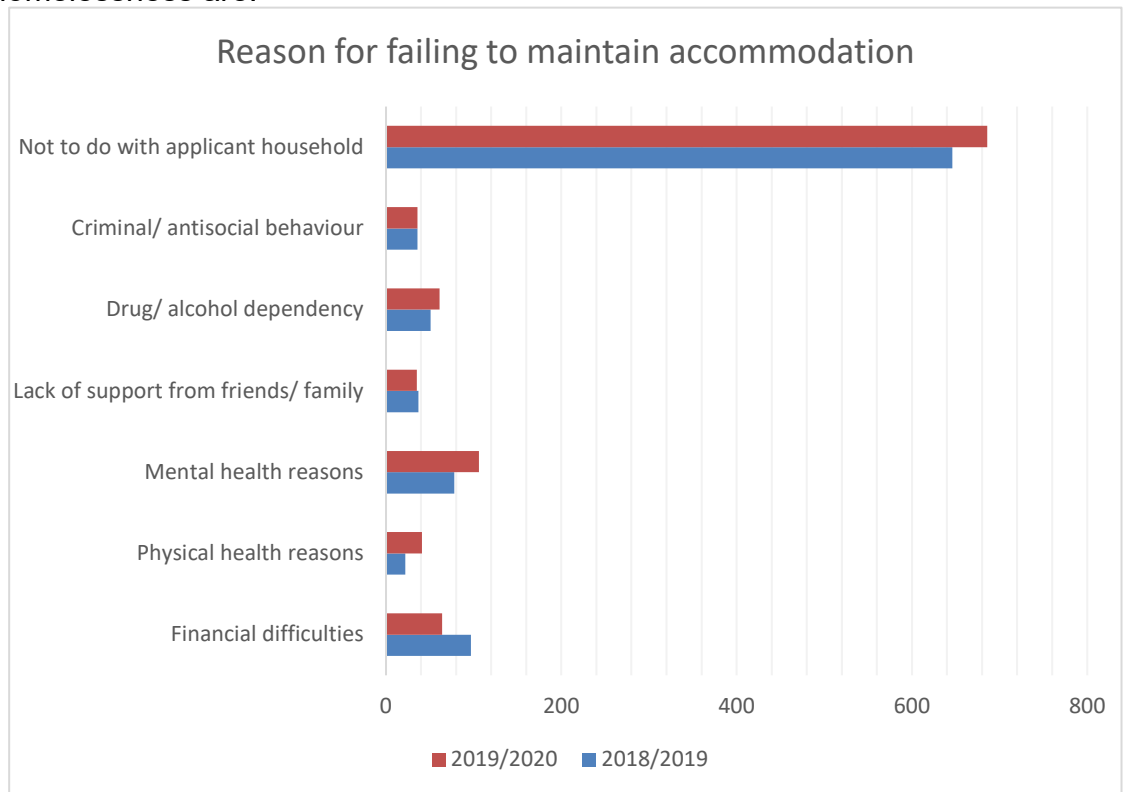
3.3 The gender mix of homeless presentations has been fairly stable since 2012/13 with the average proportion being around 45% female and 55% male.

3.4 The main reasons for people becoming homeless during 2018/2019 & 2019/20 are shown in the chart below:-

Reason for homelessness

Reason	2019/2020	2018/2019
Asked to leave		
Dispute within household: non-violent		
Dispute within household: violent or abusive		
Discharge from prison / other institution		
Loss of service / tied accommodation		
Loss of tenancy (non-financial)		
Arrears / mortgage default		

3.5 Most people become homeless due to being asked to leave current accommodation often due to relationship breakdown or disputes, whether with a partner or parent. Loss of tenancy accommodation due to arrears / mortgage is expected to increase once the Covid-19 eviction ban is lifted. This could place a strain on our service if the homeless presentation numbers are high.

3.6 The main factors that applicants identify themselves as having contributed to their homelessness are:

Reason for failing to maintain accommodation

Reason	2019/2020	2018/2019
Not to do with applicant household		
Criminal/ antisocial behaviour		
Drug/ alcohol dependency		
Lack of support from friends/ family		
Mental health reasons		
Physical health reasons		
Financial difficulties		

3.7   This shows that in most cases homelessness is not due to any specific factor / underlying issue. For most people homelessness can be resolved with a housing outcome without the need for additional support / professional intervention.

3.8   On average around 8% of people who present as homeless report having slept rough at some point in the last 3 months prior to presentation and around 6% on the night before presenting.

3.9   Around 6% of homeless applicants have been looked after children. In 2018/2019, 28 people had left care 5 or more years ago and 23 within the last 5 years. In 2019/2020 the figures were 62 and 23 respectively.

3.10   Around 4% of homeless applicants are ex-forces personnel. In 2018/2019, 44 people had left the forces 5 or more years ago and 12 within the last 5 years. In 2019/2020 the figures were 39 and 4 respectively.

4.	**Local housing supply and demand issues**

4.1   The Council operates a Common Housing Register and shared Housing Allocations Policy with the main Registered Social Landlords in Highland. This is called the Highland Housing Register.

4.2   We undertake an annual monitoring report on the Highland Housing Register. At 31st of March 2021 there were 9959 applicants on the housing register. This represents a significant increase from last year which stood at 7298. The increase in applications can be credited to two factors. Firstly, there was over 500 less allocations compared to last year. Secondly, the HHR partners agreed to pause re-registration and cancelling applications due to Covid-19. The Highland Housing Register allocations policy is needs based, with points awarded to applicants according to housing needs categories. We operate a choice based letting scheme in Caithness where there are specific low demand issues.

4.3   The table below shows the main housing needs points categories and the proportion of people housed last year with these needs:

Points Categories - Proportion of Applicants & Lets

	Accessile House	Homeless ness	Need to Reside	Overcrow ding	Poor housing Condition	Care & Support	Underocc upation	Extreme Overcrow ding
■ % of applications	14	9	59	19	4	3	24	2
■ % housed	25	46	83	23	4	9	12	6

■ % of applications ■ % housed
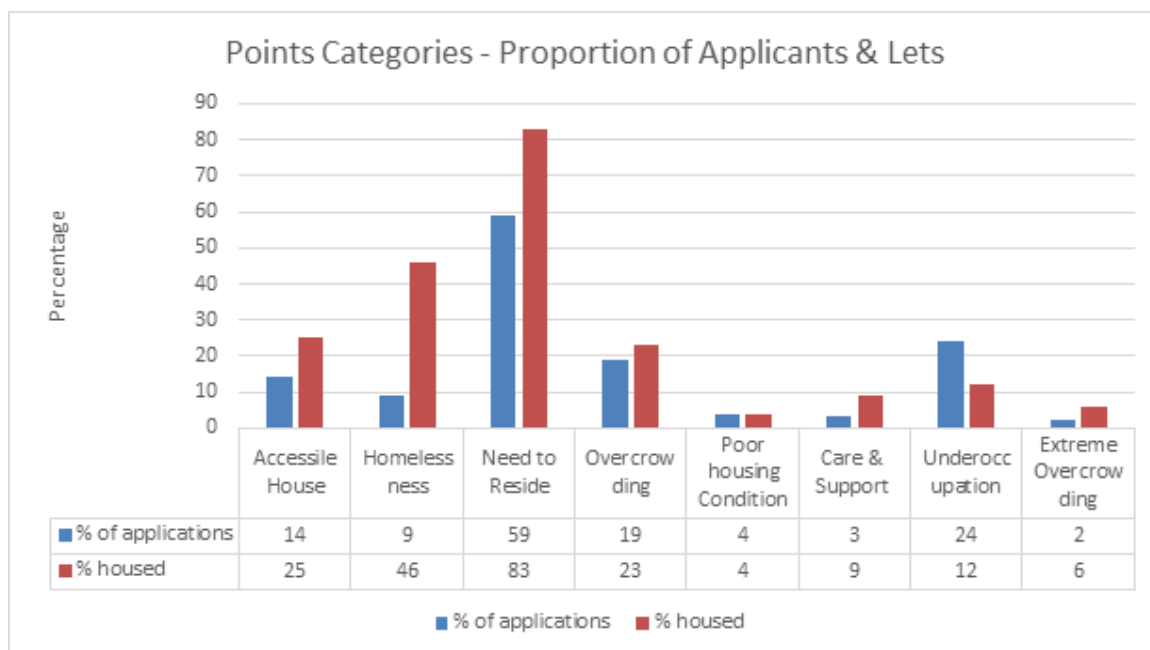
4.4   In developing and implementing this Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan the Council needs to balance the needs of homeless households to achieve permanent housing outcomes as quickly as possible with the need to address other categories of urgent housing need, such as those relating to people with urgent medical conditions or those living in overcrowded or poor-quality private sector housing. We also need to consider areas where we cannot achieve rapid rehousing for all cases within the current housing market.

4.5   Highland's draft LHS sets the targets for affordable housing which between 2021 – 2026 aims to deliver 500 units pre-annum. The table below highlights where these units would be built

4.6

Housing Market Area	Units Approvals per year	Unit approvals over 5 years
Badenoch & Strathspey	30	150
Caithness	20	100
Inverness	220	1100
Lochaber	40	200
Nairn	30	150
East Ross	50	250
Mid Ross	50	250
Wester Ross	15	75
Skye & Lochalsh	30	150
Sutherland	15	75
Highland	500	2500

4.7   Areas with greatest housing pressure are being targeted for most for units. Furthermore, in order to rapidly re-house homeless households, the majority of these units will have to be 1 or 2 bedrooms. As of 31/03/2021, 80% of all homeless applicants had a one bedroom need and 13% have a two-bedroom need.

| 4.8 | We will work with our HHR partner landlords to award sufficient homeless priority to these property types to allow us to meet our homeless demand more rapidly by 2024. |

| **5.** | **Prevention** |

5.1 <u>Care Experienced Young People</u>

5.1.1 Our updated [Highland Care Leavers Housing Options Protocol](#) was agreed in May 2019. It strengthened our approach to working with care leavers needing rehoused in crisis with more challenging needs and our commitment to supporting relationships through consistent services. We are running training and networking sessions to raise awareness of 'what works' re. moving onto independent living.

5.1.2 Last year 17 care leavers were housed by Highland Council and our HHR RSL partners. This is an increase from an average of 10 'Protocol' lets over the past 4 years. Shared efforts to keep care leavers approaching us in crisis out of traditional homeless accommodation are proving successful.

5.1.3 Priorities to 2024 are:
- To work with colleagues to ensure that every young person in care is encouraged, enabled and empowered to 'stay put' remaining in positive care settings until they are ready to move on - and, during this time, is helped to prepare for successful independent living.
- To establish an approach in line with the 'Housing First for Youth' model for young people at high risk of chaotic 'homeless careers'
- Supporting housing and support officers to use relationship-based approaches, based on understanding, empathy, respect, and 'stickability' – and informed by the experiences of tenants with lived experience of leaving care
- Offering a wider range of 'stepping-stone' options including shared tenancies

5.1.4 These priorities are in line with [Highland Corporate Parenting Plan 2018](#) and the Scotland's '[Improving Care Leavers Housing Pathways'](#)

5.2 <u>Digital Housing Support Model for Young People/ Leaving Home Planning</u>

5.2.1 The Council's Corporate Parenting / Guidance Team is continuing its partnership with the Calman Trust to develop a digital delivery model of support aimed at supporting young people in a way they will find easy to engage with which provides them with support and solutions around leaving home information/planning.

5.2.2 The digital application, HasAnswers, which is currently being tested with service users offers an early intervention 'triage' service to young people experiencing difficulties in the transition into independent living. It provides a two-pronged approach, comprising the delivery of practical support and advice through a digital app as well as access to an online chat facility providing links to a trained support worker. Support is accessible to young people by smartphone or on PC.

5.2.3   Concurrently, through delivery of leaving home sessions in Secondary Schools, where they will be introduced to HasAnswers, young people will leave school with an awareness of the practical challenges of finding and keeping a home, and with an app on their phone that gives direct access to local support and advice before things go badly wrong, to avert further breakdown.

5.2.4   Research indicates that if young people can learn to access assistance early, they are more likely to overcome their difficulties, averting future crisis and the underlying expectation that nothing can be done until circumstances completely break down.

5.2.5   This will operate initially as a pilot project, to test the use of digital technology through HasAnswers as a means to providing support.

5.2.6   If successful in supporting young people, the model could potentially be adapted to include a wider range of housing support topics and can be expanded for use by a more extensive group of service users, It can also be used to inform and develop future housing support provision in Highland from 2021/22 onwards.

5.3   <u>North & Islands Hub Enhanced Section 11 Project</u>

5.3.1   Overview
The Section 11 Project was a pilot scheme between February 2019 to September 2019 aimed at reducing evictions from Registered Social Landlords. Four local authority homelessness /Housing Options Teams and seven housing associations with stock in the N&I Hub area participated in the pilot project. During which enhanced activities in relation to the serving of, and responding to, section 11 notices were trialled. While the overall objective was to prevent homelessness, in cases where that was not possible, the project ensured a smooth a transition as possible towards a positive housing outcome for the service-user.

5.3.2   Outline
Housing association landlords:
a) issue an enhanced version of a Section 11 Notice to the local authority Homelessness/Housing Options Team at the same time as serving Notice of Seeking Possession on the tenant which;
b) shared enhanced case information additional to the information statutorily required as part of the section 11 notice, with the Homelessness/Housing Options Team.
c) informed the Homelessness/Housing Options Team if and when a case reached court and to and work collaboratively with the staff of the Homelessness/ Housing Options Team in order to prevent homelessness wherever possible.

5.3.3   Following receipt of a section 11 notice, the staff of local authority Homelessness/Housing Options Teams:

a) kept the housing association officer informed of what actions are being taken by the team in relation to the case, e.g., attempts to make contact, appointments and meetings with the tenant, outcomes achieved, etc, and

b) worked collaboratively with the staff of the housing association whenever it is felt that this may have a positive effect on preventing homelessness.

5.3.4   As well as sharing more information and more communication between the housing association and the local authority Homelessness/Housing Options Teams other joint activities included meetings with the tenant at which behaviours might prevent tenancy sustainment could be discussed along with future alternative housing options.

5.3.5   During the Pilot, homelessness was prevented in at least 96% of cases referred, and up to 100% in the case of some housing association landlords. In total, 131 Section 11 notices were served and only five resulted in eviction.

Some landlords made no evictions and thus saw a 100% reduction in evictions from the Pilot period. The reduction in the level of evictions across all participating landlords was 69% compared with the previous year.

5.3.6   Following the success of the project, the HHR Partnership Group agreed to expand the Section 11 Project beyond the original Pilot areas in Highland. All HHR landlords will now issue a Section 11 notice at the point of Notice of Proceedings, this new Section 11 process will become live later this year.

5.4   Council Tax / Non-Domestic Rates Bankruptcy Notices

5.4.1   The Highland Council's Revenues Team currently raise proceedings to petition for bankruptcy as part of recovery action in cases of Council Tax or Non-Domestic Rates arrears. These cases can place households at risk of homelessness as recovery action of this kind is usually taken by the Council when a debtor is known to own a significant asset.

5.4.2   There have been some recent instances of cases in Highland where Accountant in Bankruptcy Trustees have been successful in gaining re-possession orders and eviction decrees against such households.

5.4.3   During 2020/21 no homeless presentations were made to the Council in respect of these cases when recovery action had resulted in the loss of a family home.

5.4.4   Although low volumes of these cases are seen, they can be high impact cases due to vulnerabilities within the household which have led to the non-engagement with Revenues processes.

5.4.5   Corporate arrangements for referrals between the Council's Revenues and Housing Options Teams are in place to ensure that all appropriate Revenues recovery cases are highlighted to the Council's Housing Options Team.

5.4.6   A referral process has been in place from 2019/20.Specific monitoring of these case referrals will evaluate the success of this process in preventing homelessness.

5.5 <u>Move on Project.</u>

5.5.1 The Move on Project is funded jointly by European Social Fund (ESF) / The Highland Council and aims to provide a co-ordinated approach to supporting service users who face multiple barriers and find it difficult to engage with services on a regular basis. The lead organisations for the delivery of project is Highland Council, NHS Highland, and Care and Learning services.

5.5.2 The project targets individuals with multiple barriers where individual mainstream services are not enough to address complex needs and is aimed at service users who are often unwilling or reluctant to engage with services before reaching crisis point. These service users are likely to be known to services and expected to be resource intensive to support to the point of positive engagement with services.

5.5.3 As well as service users with multiple complex needs the project will also provide a coordinative service approach to encourage better engagement levels for people who are care experienced and as a result have dis-engaged with services.

5.5.4 Move On will also provide its services to individuals, and families who have most recently experienced unemployment, and poverty deprivation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and are unaware of the support networks available throughout Highland, and UK wide.

5.5.5 The Project will provide a person-centred approach providing a generic key-worker to work with individuals tailoring supports to address individual's needs and preventing repeat reactive engagement/non-engagement with services.

5.5.6 Move on Officers delivering the Project will provide planning, co-ordination and have a facilitation role covering Inner Moray Firth, Caithness & East Sutherland, Lochaber, Skye & West Coast, and Care Experienced focused covering North/South.

5.5.7 Ongoing assessment will be critical to tailor support to the service user and their needs and will aim to provide a holistic approach to those experiencing the greatest barriers to

- Reduce Homeless Presentations & increase tenancy sustainability
- Maximise incomes
- Develop financial capability
- Build resilience and life skills
- Eventually move towards positive employment

Project outcomes in relation to these headings will be evaluated throughout the lifetime of the project in line with ESF funding guidelines.

5.5.8 To be eligible for the service, users must meet one of the following criteria:
-Workless

-Lone parent
-On a low income

5.5.9   The project is overseen by a Partnership Steering Group which reports to the Community Planning Partnership board, and has been extended up to 31st of December 2021, and will be reviewed for continual service after the specified timeframe.

5.5.10   Any service or lead professional can refer to the Move on Project if they are having trouble in engaging with service users.

5.5.11   Move On officers within the project have been determined to find alternative measures of improving re engagement with services through changes of approach, and by looking at the needs of the individual and building meaningful relationships which has been pivotal in the number of outcomes achieved so far.

5.5.12   The project aims to continue providing outcomes for all services, and encourage housing teams, and both public/private sector services to refer to Move On Project consistently.

5.5.13   Housing Options Officers will make referrals to the Move on Project for homeless service users with complex housing support or residential/supported accommodation needs.

5.5.14   **Appendix One** provides Move on Project referral and outcome data.

6.	**Temporary Accommodation & The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2020 Compliance**

6.1.1   The previous Unsuitable Accommodation Order (UAO) stipulated that 'bed and breakfast-type' accommodation could not be used for more than seven days for any homeless households which contained children or pregnant women. The Scottish Government extended the UAO to apply to all homeless households from 30th September 2020.

6.1.2   Prior to the extension, there were no breaches of the UAO in Highland during 2019-20. The UAO revision means that this legislation now applies to a significantly larger number of homeless households per year as shown in the data tables below

6.1.3   During the Covid-19 pandemic, The Scottish Government approved exemptions to the Order until 30 June 2021. In certain circumstances these temporary exemptions can be applied to single homeless households but not to homeless households containing pregnant women or children. Highland's current use of 'unsuitable' temporary accommodation for single homeless applicants is detailed below. These cases are currently classified as temporary exemptions under the coronavirus legislation. The numbers reflect specific issues in parts of Highland with historic reliance on B&B / HMO-type accommodation which is now deemed unsuitable under the extended Order.

Use of 'Unsuitable' temporary accommodation as of 4 May 2021	
Area	Number of clients in unsuitable temporary accommodation
Inverness	3
Ross & Cromarty	19
Lochaber	8
Total	**30**

6.1.4   In response to the challenges of the revised UAO, the Council has been increasing its stock of self-contained temporary accommodation and developing our use of shared temporary homeless accommodation (Shared TFA) as noted below.

6.1.5   We have also been working with Private Rented Sector providers to redevelop this B&B type 'Unsuitable' temporary accommodation into better quality UAO compliant forms of temporary accommodation however this has not been possible in all our contracted PRS temporary accommodation.

6.2   Accommodation Pressures

6.2.1   The table below sets out numbers of homeless applications made in Highland where a positive determination has been made and a duty to house permanently has been established. A duty also exists for these cases to provide Temporary Accommodation whilst a permanent housing outcome is identified.

Number of Homeless Presentations Made 2018/19 (From HL1), where a duty to house has been established by area office and bedroom need							
	Household Bedroom Need						
Area	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5+**	**Total**	**%**
Alness	57	17	5	1		80	7%
Badenoch & Strathspey	50	12	8	3		73	6%
Dingwall	175	39	18	6	3	241	20%
Inverness	344	82	30	10	2	468	38%
Lochaber	128	4	3			135	11%
Nairn	30	14	4	1		49	4%
Portree	84	11	2	1		98	8%
Sutherland	19	1				20	2%
Thurso	17	3				20	2%
Wick	27	5		1		33	3%
Total	**931**	**188**	**70**	**23**	**5**	1217	

6.2.2   This distribution of cases has been relatively static over the last 5 years. This shows that most homeless presentations are made in Inverness and will reside in temporary accommodation in Inverness while they await an offer of housing there.

6.2.3   Wider housing pressure also has an impact on the length of time people spend in temporary accommodation.

6.2.4   Higher average length of stay in temporary accommodation is directly related to the availability of social rented housing. Generally, the areas where we have the highest numbers of homeless cases and the longest average stays in temporary accommodation are the areas where we are allocating the highest proportion of social rented housing to homeless households.

6.2.5   It means that in our most pressured areas, households spend much longer living in temporary accommodation compared to other areas. In lower demand areas of Highland applicants can obtain a homeless outcome much more quickly .

6.3   Current Provision
6.3.1   Historically the Council has relied on privately rented single rooms or bed and breakfast type shared accommodation, with less than a third provided through the Council's own stock. The pattern of temporary accommodation has also varied across areas, with most private sector provision in Inverness.

6.3.2   Since 2014 we have had an active programme of shifting the balance of accommodation towards the uses of Council owned, self-contained furnished accommodation, with a target of increasing this provision by 50 units a year.

6.3.3   The table below shows our temporary accommodation provision since 2018 and highlights our shift from HMO style accommodation to self-contained furnished accommodation.

Accommodation Type	May-18	May-19	May-20	May-21
Council-owned TFA	227	305	377	431
Council Owned TFA Share	8	17	10	26
Leasing Scheme Properties	151	152	162	185
Framework B&B / HMO	226	217	189	166

6.4   Future Temporary Accommodation Provision

6.4.1   The Council's long-term strategy for temporary accommodation is to increase the use of self-contained, furnished Council or Housing Association property, and reduce the reliance on private sector property. This provides the best quality for clients at the least cost to the Council.

6.4.2   The Community Services Committee agreed in April 2016 that we should move to a model where the majority of temporary accommodation is provided in Council owned (Housing Revenue Account) properties.   We currently have 431 HRA properties used as temporary accommodation, an increase of almost 40% since April 2017.

6.4.3   We aim to continue to increase the use of HRA furnished accommodation by 50 units a year over the next 5 years (total 250 units). This will eliminate the use of PRS HMO accommodation for anything other than emergency / crisis response.

6.5   Shared Temporary Furnished Accommodation (TFA)

6.5.1   Due to the shortage of UAO compliant one-bedroom temporary accommodation, the Council undertook a pilot scheme in Inverness and Ross & Cromarty to allow two people to share a two- or three-bedroom Council property as their Temporary Accommodation whilst they awaited a permanent outcome to their homelessness.

6.5.2   The pilot took homeless applicants who resided in B&B type temporary accommodation and initially service-users with no or low support needs were offered this model of temporary accommodation. Following the conclusion of the successful pilot, the project was opened for those with medium support needs to further reduce 'Unsuitable' temporary accommodation use.

6.5.3   Due to the higher demands on homelessness services the areas with the largest stock of shared units is Inverness and Ross-Shire with Nairn and Fort William now also developing a stock of Shared TFA.

6.5.4   In Inverness, all the properties used for the project are two-bedroom self-contained flats taken from mainstream HRA stock. In Ross-Shire, the shared properties are three-bed houses, converted into a two-bedroom property with two separate living rooms. All parts of the accommodation are shared apart from the bedrooms and living rooms. The three-bed properties in Ross-Shire gives homeless service-users with access to children the opportunity to have them reside in the accommodation. This alleviates the pressure from the service to offer sole-use TFA units to all applicants with access to children. All bedrooms have locks install in both areas.

6.5.5   A Council Tax exemption is obtained in respect of the properties used provided they are shared supported accommodation. Prepayment energy meters are installed in the properties and sharers are encouraged to take turns 'topping up' the prepayment cards for the meters and this process is set out during the matching and tenancy induction processes we have developed within the Shared TFA model.

6.5.6   The gross rent levels charged in the shared temporary accommodation units in Inverness is £57.98 which is based on one half of the standard 2 bed HRA rent for the property with homeless service charges added in respect of furnishings etc. Ross Shire's rents are slightly higher at £69.46 due to the use of larger 3 bed properties. The comparable rent for a single person PRS B&B type / HMO room procured through the Council's contract framework agreement is £ 185.92 per week.

6.5.7   Which is currently the main alternative temporary accommodation model for single homeless applicants, the benefits of our Shared TFA model are significant in terms of quality and affordability. The project is still in its' development stage and benefits, such a reduction in 'revolving-doors' homeless presentations and multiple temporary accommodation placements will be assessed later in 2021.

6.5.8   There are currently seventeen shared properties in Inverness (34 units), with five further properties identified for shared stock. There are six shared properties (12 units) in Ross-Shire, one in Nairn and one in Fort William.

6.6.9   Inverness shared accommodation offers 34 individual tenancies; 33 properties are occupied (one is currently not available). The rent balances as follows:
19 tenants zero balance
6 tenants rent arrears less than £200
4 tenants rent arrears between £200 and £500
4 tenants rent arrears between £500 and £800.

6.6.10   A Matching Process and a Tenancy Induction have been developed to identify and match potential candidates for sharing and set expectations and 'ground rules' for sharers. This process has been based on the Sharer's Toolkit developed by Crisis titled 'A Shared Approach Setting up and Supporting Tenancies in Shared Houses'. An Occupancy Agreement has also been drafted for use by the Council's Legal Team.

6.6.11   To enable Shared project expansion an Inner Moray Firth TFA Share Team was formed. The table below outlines what staff was hired and when they started in post. A formula was devised based staffing level vs Shared TAF Unit stock. One FTE Temporary Accommodation Assistant (TAA) and 0.5 FTE Caretaker (CT) are required to manage and turn over a patch of 30 Shared TFA units.

One FTE TFA Share Team Leader	In post November 20
Two FTE Temporary Accommodation Assistants	In post March 2021
One FTA Care Takers	In post April 2021

6.6.12   Key tasks of TA Assistants include the sharer matching process, signup and benefits processes, turnover of voids and management of the tenancy, post holders also deal with low level ASB and 'breach of tenancy' matters. One full time Caretaker is currently in the team to assist with void turn over and physical resettlement tasks. Issues such as high level ASB or other 'breach of tenancy' matters are dealt with by the Housing Options Officer case holder for the service-user as part of their generic case holder role.

6.5.13   The following targets for the creation of additional shared TFA stock during 2021/22 have been set to allow us to end use of 'Unsuitable' forms of temporary accommodation, minimise our use of one-bedroom properties as temporary accommodation in recognition of the demand on those properties as permanent outcomes and address gaps in TA provision across Highland.

Shared TFA Additional Unit Targets 2021/22		
	Properties	TFA Share Units
Inverness	11	22
Ross & Cromarty	11	22

Nairn	3	6
Skye	5	10
Totals	30	60

6.5.14   The costs associated with TFA Share furnishings and void costs will be covered from within existing resources and service charges applied to the temporary tenancy rent. This Shared TFA team will be self-funding by year 5 of this RRTP using savings made from a reduction in spot purchase HMO contract rooms.

7   Housing Support

7.1   <u>Housing Support Provision</u>

7.1.1   Short–term housing support is important to reduce homelessness and increase tenancy sustainment. There is a legal requirement to assess and provide access to short-term housing support where needed for all homeless and potentially homeless people.

7.1.2   The annual budget for short-term housing support services is £1.5m, delivered through a framework agreement divided into four geographical lots across Highland, with an additional lot providing accommodation-based housing support. Overall four Providers operate across the different lots, these include; New Start Highland, Salvation Army, Y People and Gateway (Highland Homeless Trust).

7.1.3   In March 2021, the Council extended the current framework arrangements for Housing Support and Supported Accommodation Services for the period 01 April 2021 to 30 September 2022. This extension is to allow the Housing Service time to review the approach to service delivery in order to meet the requirements of Housing First, rapid rehousing and the challenges presented by Covid-19 and tenants residing in the private rented sector.

7.1.4   Currently there are, around 600 households receiving short-term housing support at any one time. This includes around 35 people in specialist supported accommodation services.

7.1.5   **Appendix Two** provides a breakdown of the short-term housing support referrals processed during 2020/21 by level of support need. In total 655 referrals were received, representing 535 homeless cases (representing 51% of the total homeless applications) and 120 cases for tenants in secure tenancies who have been deemed at risk of homelessness.

7.1.6   It is also our intention to develop robust pathways to support tenants and landlords in the private rented sector. We recognise that minimising homelessness presentations from the private sector is a key challenge, and we aspire to develop this key area of work in line with our future prevention strategy.

7.1.7   We regularly consult with all key stakeholders regarding the Framework contractual requirements and service delivery. Our most recent consultation highlighted several key areas that are currently under review, these include:

- adopting a more holistic and multi-disciplinary approach for the more complex cases;
- assisting service users to access specialist services as required;
- providing earlier intervention when support outcomes are not being delivered;
- ensuring service users are motivated to engage with support;
- Introducing exit strategies, at the commencement of support, that will help to minimise long term dependency on support.

7.2   <u>Trauma Informed Events (TIE) / Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE) - Training for Housing Options Teams</u>

7.2.1   As a result of a greater general awareness of how Adverse Childhood Events and trauma affects homeless service-users and contributes heavily to entrenched and repeat homelessness, staff training around this is under development.

7.2.2   Initial team training is being scheduled for staff dealing with service users with multiple & complex neds, with a view to extending and cascading these necessary skills into generic Housing Option teams. There will also be plans to extend this to our Housing Management teams with the aim of preventing homelessness from our own tenants.

7.2.3   The training will be hosted by psychiatrists and psychologists from the NHS Highland's Drug and Alcohol Recovery Services. The aim of the training will be to provide insights and understanding of core skills:

- Adverse Childhood Events;
- Severe and multiple disadvantage and;
- Evidence based interventions (what works with) trauma and delivering psychologically informed support.

7.2.4   This training also seeks to further develop our peer-based supervision model for reflective practice and supervision. Particular topics that will be covered will include;
- psychological awareness,
- engagement skills,
- motivational interviewing,
- solution focussed practice,
- adding Reflective Practice to staff support & development meetings,
- what trauma is and how it impacts people,
- how to recognize the signs of trauma in an individual.

7.2.5   The objective of these sessions is to develop an evidence-based understanding of the challenges faced by Housing Options staff when carrying out their casework and also develop an understanding of key TIE & PIE theories and how they translate into daily practice in their role when working with service users with complex support needs.

7.2.6   Guidance will be given to staff to put the skills & knowledge into practice which we are developing in partnership with Scotland's Homeless Network as well as NHS Highland colleagues.

8	**Settled / Supported Accommodation**

8.1   Supported Accommodation

8.1.1   Accommodation based short-term housing support is commissioned as a separate lot on the framework. In total, 35 units provide accommodation across 4 private rented sector HMO properties which the Provider leases. This includes, one 3-unit property located in Invergordon and 33 units dispersed across 3 Inverness based properties.

8.1.2   The rent and property management costs are recouped through the rent charges, usually covered through Housing Benefit.

8.1.3   As part of the review of future housing support provision, we introduced in April 2021 a 'test and learn' pilot pathway to support service users transitioning through supported accommodation to a more permanent housing outcome. Previously this group of service users could reside in supported accommodation for up to 2 years, we hope to reduce this timescale to approximately 3 to 6 months. The key focus for this client group will be to assess and identify their barriers to long term tenancy sustainment, and source the appropriate solutions and services to meet these
needs.

8.2   Increasing Supply of Social Housing in Highland
8.2.1   A detailed analysis of homelessness in Highland is provided at **Appendix 3,** this sets out the social housing supply challenges in Highland by providing an analysis of:
- The number of homeless presentations broken down by area and bedroom need received during 2018/2019 where a positive decision has been made and a permanent duty to house has been established.

- The number and percentages of allocations made to HHR applicants in 2019/2020 with homeless priority points, broken down by property size, geographical area and social landlord.

- the number of Highland Housing Register (HHR) waiting list applicants with homeless priority points as of 31st of March 2021 broken down by property size and geographical area.

8.2.2   The data contained in **Appendix Three** indicates that the numbers of homeless across Highland are relatively stable and that the numbers of tenancies becoming available for allocation Highland wide has the potential to meet homeless demand by increasing the percentage lets to homeless households in particular areas.

8.2.3   The data also shows that there are areas within Highland where housing supply does not meet homeless demand and although there appears to be capacity to increase the percentage of lets to homeless applicants in lower demand areas, it is unlikely that this would be considered to be a reasonable offer in some households circumstances given some of the distances involved.

8.2.4   For example, offering a single homeless applicant with a family support network in Inverness a permanent outcome to their homelessness in Wick, 110 miles away is unlikely to be considered a reasonable offer. However, offering them one in Nairn at 16 miles away or Alness at 20 miles away may be reasonable in some circumstances.

8.2.5   The data also indicates that there are areas of high homeless demand in in the Inner Moray Firth in Highland where there is potential to increase the percentage lets to homeless households in Nairn, Dingwall and Alness by some landlords to alleviate some of the pressure in Inverness, the same options are not available to ease the homeless pressures shown in Portree.

8.2.6   The data in **Appendix Three** will be used to inform the mix of properties developed through the delivery of the Council's Strategic Housing Investment Plan. This will ensure that the Local Housing Strategy targets of around 500 units per annum will be built according to meet the identified homeless demand in high pressure areas.

8.2.7   This data has also been used to consider the need to review the HHR Allocations Policy in view of the Rapid Rehousing approach. The data demonstrates that there are specific homeless pressures and priorities within high demand areas in Highland that will be challenging to meet more rapidly within the current allocations policy.

8.3   **Highland Housing Register Review**
8.3.1   A review of the Highland Housing Register (HHR) allocations policy is underway with the aim of better meeting current housing needs in the Highlands. The review began in February 2018 and has a clear focus on ensuring that all the partner landlords meet their statutory and regulatory obligations.

8.3.2   There are several aspects of our current HHR allocations policy affecting lets to homeless applicants. These are being revised as part of the HHR review to consider their impact on Rapid Rehousing in Highland within the five-year transition plan period and beyond.

8.3.3   These changes to HHR points categories and working practises are designed to assist Housing Officers to better identify housing needs ensure homeless and those with unmet housing needs are prioritised for a permanent outcome as part of a holistic housing options process.

8.3.4   **Appendix Four** provides an in-depth outline of some of the HHR changes being proposed. While below provides an overview.

8.3.5   **Award category changes:** The current HHR review has outlined several potential changes to the HHR points categories and have had these surveyed by the general public. The proposed category changes are:

- Removing Short-Assured Tenancy Points. No points will be awarded for being a private sector tenant. Insecure Tenure points (no legal right to reside) will remain
- Private Sector tenants will only receive points if they receive a valid Notice to Quit
- Creation of Domestic Abuse points
- Amending Sharing Facilities so only applicants who share facilities with more than two different households, such as those living in Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO), will get points
- Low Poor Housing Condition (PHC) points are to be removed and Medium category criteria will be widened out.
- Applicants will only receive PHC points if they have no options for resolving the repair issues
- Need to Reside to be reviewed
- Extreme overcrowding will be removed
- Access to Children points to be amended
- Only HHR Partner tenants will be eligible for under-occupation points
- Care and Support will be simplified, double counting will end and more priority to be given to those leaving care institutions
- Review Potentially Homeless points and consider increasing award
- Remove Time spent in temporary accommodation points (as part of a wider change to homelessness allocation)

8.3.6   These considerations are still open to review, and further remodelling will be undertaken to assess the implications of the proposed changes before approval.

8.3.7   The public consultation results showed an overall positive response from the public and key partner agencies.

8.3.8   The review is also considering wider structural changes to HHR operation beyond amending points and categories.

- Audit of Choice Base-Letting in Caithness to examine where improvements are needed
- Continual staff training for Mid-Market Rent outcomes as an alternative housing option for homeless applicants. A pathway has already been developed which requires HHR staff to be more proactive with homeless clients to support them in accessing this option.
- Creation of a third allocation list. The new lists will be:
  - Transfer List – HHR tenants
  - Homeless List – Homeless applicants
  - General Waiting List – all other tenures
- Reviewing letting areas and re-mapping
- Review Section 5 process

- Considering homeowners' ineligible for an HHR allocation unless they meet certain exemptions.

8.4   **Housing First**

8.4.1   Housing First is an internationally recognised method of dealing with complex homeless individuals which has been implemented across the world since the 1980s. It has seven principles and fidelity to these is key to its success. These principles collective ensure that secure housing is available and person-centred, open-ended and flexible support is provided in order to resolve and prevent homelessness and reduce other harms.

8.4.2   In January 2019, the Highland Council and NHS Highland were awarded funding to develop a Housing First (HF) project by the Highland Alcohol & Drugs Partnership (HADP) with a specific focus on homeless service users with complex needs who were at high risk of drug or alcohol related harm.

8.4.3   In February 2020, Housing First Highland accepted its first referral into its multi-disciplinary team and now has ten clients receiving intensive wrap-around support. All ten clients are housed in secure tenancy across the inner-Moray Firth with the Council and RSL partners.

8.4.4   Housing First Highland is in year 2 of a pilot and operates separately to mainstream tenancy management in the Inner Moray Firth. When progressing through this pilot phase, options to scale up Housing First in Highland are being explored with key partners and are currently focused on scaling up to:
- Develop a Housing First Aftercare pathway as an alternative means to deliver our Corporate Parent duties around Housing and support for care experienced young people with multiple & complex needs.

- Work with partners to develop and implement a Rural Housing First pilot in Highland building on the learning from the Inner Moray Firth pilot

- Explore options with key partners to scale up the existing Inner Moray Firth pilot and broaden its primary selection criteria and caseload capacity by introducing additional professional specialisms into the project through rapid access pathways to a broader range of health & social care and support specialisms.

8.4.5   We are currently working with the Highland Alcohol and Drug Partnership is developing an evaluation model for our Housing First pilot project will be used to ensure critical indicators are being met and project outcomes are being delivered and crucially to examine the benefits of the approach to service users.

8.4.6   The finalised evaluation report will be included with future revisions of the RRTP

8.5   <u>Working with the Private Rented Sector & Bringing Empty Homes back into use</u>

8.5.1   We are continuing our partnership work with Crisis to engage with the Private Rented Sector (PRS) in Highland to build a closer working relationship and

develop referral and support Pathways with the PRS. This work will take forward the positive feedback we received from the PRS in respect of a consultation on homelessness carried out in 2019. Commencement of this work was delayed due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

8.5.2   Since previous RRTP updates we have brought Shelter into this piece of work as a new partner which will add a focus on bringing empty homes in Highland back into use through Shelter's work with the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership, which is funded by the Scottish Government.

8.5.3   We are currently recruiting a new post of Private Rented Sector/Empty Homes Liaison Officer which will focus on developing our strategy on this over the next 2 years. Targets for this post are to bring 10 empty homes in Highland back into use and to develop new partnership working and referral arrangements with the PRS in Highland.

8.5.4   A PRS / Empty Homes Action plan will be developed and included with future RRTP updates.

9   Partnership Working & Consultation/ Engagement

9.1.1   <u>Partnership Working</u>
Discussions are ongoing with key partners regarding Rapid Rehousing in Highland, these discussions have involved the 3rd sector partners, HHR Partners, the Health & Social Care Team and HADP.

9.1.2   In addition, we have been working with the North & Islands Hub on a programme of stakeholder RRTP events. This are ongoing and have involved various partners including the Scottish Government, Scottish Housing Network, NHS Highland, HHR partner landlords, Care & Learning, the 3rd sector and the Private Rented Sector.

9.1.3   The following Specific RRTP partnership working arrangements are in place:

- **Housing First Steering Group**   The Housing First Steering Group has been set up as a subgroup of HADP and is chaired independently by James Dunbar, Chief Executive Newstart Highland. The Group includes all key partners and stakeholders. The group is meeting frequently to deliver on scaling up Housing First in Highland.

- **Highland 3rd Sector**
There will be specific consultation and engagement developed in respect of the 3rd Sector in Highland. Including RRTP discussions at Inverness Foodstuffs (Homeless Charity), and Homeless Action Inverness meetings

- **Private Rented Sector**
Inner Moray Firth landlord forum, to be set up upon conclusion of the Crisis PRS consultation exercise, will involve PRS landlords, lettings agents as well as key HC Housing and Licensing contacts. The third sector will also be invited to take part in this

Recruitment in respect of a key post to take this work forward with the PRS is underway

- **Highland Housing Register Management Group**
  Consultation is ongoing with the HHR Management Group in respect of the allocations policy review and the potential impact that Highland's RRTP will have on the review. There will be regular RRTP updates and discussion at the Management Group.

- **Highland Housing Development Hub**
  Discussions with Highland's Housing Development Hub relating to RRTP have begun. Regular updates will be given to the Hub in respect of RRTP actions and outcomes to ensure that the Council's homeless housing need and demand is reflected in the development mix of Highland's SHIP.

9.2   Service User Consultation/Engagement

9.2.1   The Council worked with Engage Scotland on a service user consultation exercise targeting homeless service users in homeless accommodation in Highland, this is part of the Scottish Housing Regulator's work with their National Panel of Tenants and Service Users.

9.2.2   A mix of temporary accommodation service providers and service users were consulted as part of this which took the form of 10-15 interviews. A mix of services users in dispersed and supported temporary accommodation in Highland, as well as some who have been re-housed via the homeless service, were involved.

9.2.3   Following this initial consultation exercise a wider Housing Options service user engagement exercise commenced, coordinated by our Tenant and Customer Engagement Team. This included:

- Reviewing existing Temporary accommodation Satisfaction Survey and widen it to cover experiences of housing options and homeless prevention measures as well as housing support provision.

- Reviewing the timing and method of carrying out the survey. Previously the survey was completed with housing staff when a service user signed up for permanent allocation. This is now being carried out face to face by the Tenant Participation team 2 to 4 weeks after a service user moves into temporary accommodation. This allows referrals for housing support, money advice and signposting to other support organisations to be made timeously. Survey results for 2020 / 21 show 84% satisfaction with Temporary Accommodation. (N.B. due to Covid restrictions surveys are currently being carried out by telephone)

- Regular drop in sessions have been held for homeless clients, with a Third Sector Partner, in an informal setting where service users can come in for a hot drink or a bowl of soup and discuss any issues they may have. These sessions are led by the Tenant Participation team involving tenants who have come through homelessness to provide peer support. Partnership

attendance at these drop-in sessions will be developed to include Health & Social Care professionals, CAB, Money Advice and the NHS harm reduction team. The purpose of this will be to provide a point of access for homeless service users to seek assistance from partner agencies. These sessions had to be paused in March 2020 due to COVID restrictions but will restart in Summer 2021

- This approach is still being piloted in the Inverness area, following evaluation consideration will be given to rolling the approach out Highland wide.

- Scottish Government RRTP funding is required for this, however it is expected that this model will be self-funding from year 3 of the RRTP using savings made from Highland's housing support and homeless resources budgets.

9.2.4   It is intended that the results of these consultation and engagement exercises will help inform ongoing transformation within temporary accommodation in Highland as well as inform the development of housing options and homeless prevention measures contained within this RRTP.

10   Highland's Rapid Rehousing Baseline Position

10.1   The Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan is designed to be a working tool and it is anticipated that this plan will continue to evolve over the transition period. An Implementation Plan which will accompany this document is being developed and will be included with future updates.

10.2   The Council is committed to meeting the objectives set out in this RRTP to tackle homelessness in Highland by transforming our homeless service provision to
-Prevent rough sleeping in Highland,
-Transform our temporary accommodation and
-Permanently house households facing homelessness in Highland as rapidly as possible

10.3   The Council's five-year RRTP is intended to modernise our homeless service provision to fit with the priorities highlighted by HARSAG, the Council looks forward to working closely with the Scottish Government to meet the objectives set out within our RRTP.