

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	5
Report No	HP/16/25

Committee: **Housing and Property**

Date: **21 May 2025**

Report Title: **Homelessness Update**

Report By: **Assistant Chief Executive - Place**

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Homelessness in Scotland is governed by several key pieces of legislation, including: The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987; The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001; and The Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003. Managing, mitigating and supporting people through homelessness is a priority for the Council and touches on a range of services and functions across the organisation.
- 1.2 Local authorities have a legal duty to help people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. There have been additional legislative requirements introduced in recent years. These have been designed by the Scottish Government to improve the standard of temporary accommodation, when this is required, and to implement a more person-centred service delivery which resolves homelessness for people as quickly and as appropriately as possible.
- 1.3 Over the last few years there has been significant focus on complying with the legislative requirements around homelessness and ultimately improving the experience and service provided for people presenting as homeless. As a result of the work of the housing options team, service and provider improvements, Highland is compliant with the legislation. Placements are made into self-contained temporary accommodation and the approach includes prioritising families and households with particular needs into Council-owned housing stock.
- 1.4 This report provides information on homelessness across Highland, including legislative duties, national policy context and Highland's performance.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to **consider** and **agree** the progress in mitigating homelessness and delivering secure housing outcomes in Highland.

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** – There are no additional resource implications arising from this report.
- 3.2 **Legal** – There are no legal implications arising from this report.
- 3.3 **Risk** – Risk is managed through regular review and reporting to allow corrective action to be taken if necessary.
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – There are no health and safety implications arising from this report.
- 3.5 **Gaelic** – There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

4 Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 This is a monitoring and update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5 Background and Legislation

- 5.1 Homelessness in Scotland is governed by several key pieces of legislation, including: The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987; The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001; and The Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003.
- 5.2 Local authorities are required to adhere to the Scottish Government's Code of Guidance on Homelessness, found here:-
<https://www.gov.scot/policies/homelessness/homelessness-guidance/>
- 5.3 Local authorities have a legal duty to help people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This includes providing information and advice on homelessness and the prevention of homelessness and offer temporary or permanent accommodation to those for whom they have accepted a legal homeless duty.
- 5.4 There have been additional legislative requirements introduced in recent years. These have been designed by the Scottish Government to improve the standard of temporary accommodation when this is required, and also to implement more person-centred service delivery. This additional legislation includes: The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2020 and the Homeless Persons (Suspension of Referrals between Local Authorities (Scotland) Order).

- 5.5 Compliance with legislation around Unsuitable Accommodation has been challenging for every local authority. Highland is compliant with the legislation because of service and provider improvements which now enable placements into self-contained temporary accommodation. These placements include prioritising families and households with particular needs into Council-owned housing stock.
- 5.6 This supplementary legislation around local connection referrals ensures that individuals and families have the choice to settle in different local authority areas. As detailed below, Highland has been successful in complying with the additional legislation although this has involved extensive and ongoing work from the local Housing Teams to meet these requirements.

6 Legislation in Practice

- 6.1 Under the above legislation, local authorities must accept and process homeless applications from individuals who believe they are homeless or who are at risk of homelessness.
- 6.2 Applications must be investigated and a determination made on whether Highland Council has a legal homeless duty to the applicant. This must be done within 28 days of an application being submitted and during this period temporary accommodation must be provided. The Highland average for assessing applications in 15 days.
- 6.3 In cases where Highland Council determines that no rehousing duty applies, applicants may appeal within 21 days if they present new evidence or circumstances. Since April 2024 we have only received three appeals, of which one was upheld. Temporary accommodation must be provided until the conclusion of any appeal.
- 6.4 Local authorities can fulfil their homeless duty through various housing options including home ownership, the private rented sector, a mid-market rental or a social housing outcome.
- 6.5 Whilst a settled outcome is sourced local authorities must provide temporary accommodation.
- 6.6 Local authorities must also conduct a housing support assessment and provide short term housing support for applicants who require this.
- 6.7 Homeless prevention is a key focus for the teams, and they work with applicants both prior to and following a homeless application to look at housing options. They will assist applicants to apply for mid-market and private rentals and can offer financial assistance through the rent deposit scheme for people who have accessed these alternative options.
- 6.8 Housing Support aims to help individuals and families maintain their tenancies. This includes assistance with understanding tenants' rights and responsibilities, budgeting and paying rent, general tenancy management including any potential anti-social issues, and signposting people to other services which may assist them. Housing Support aims to encourage independence and be a short-term intervention. On average, around 250 people are provided with housing support every month.

- 6.9 Additional long-term support is required for approximately 20% of applicants and support needs can be of varying levels. Highland Council works closely with other services such as Adult Services, NHS Mental Health Services and addiction services. As homeless households may have multiple needs, there is a requirement on Housing to ensure referral processes are in place with other public and Third Sector agencies such as Women's Aid, Citizens Advice Bureau and so on.
- 6.10 Meeting the diverse needs of homeless households has undoubtedly become more complex in recent years. This reflects issues such as demand from clients unable to access specialist health and addiction services, specialist needs such as clients without recourse to public funds, language barriers and complex family and lifestyle dynamics.

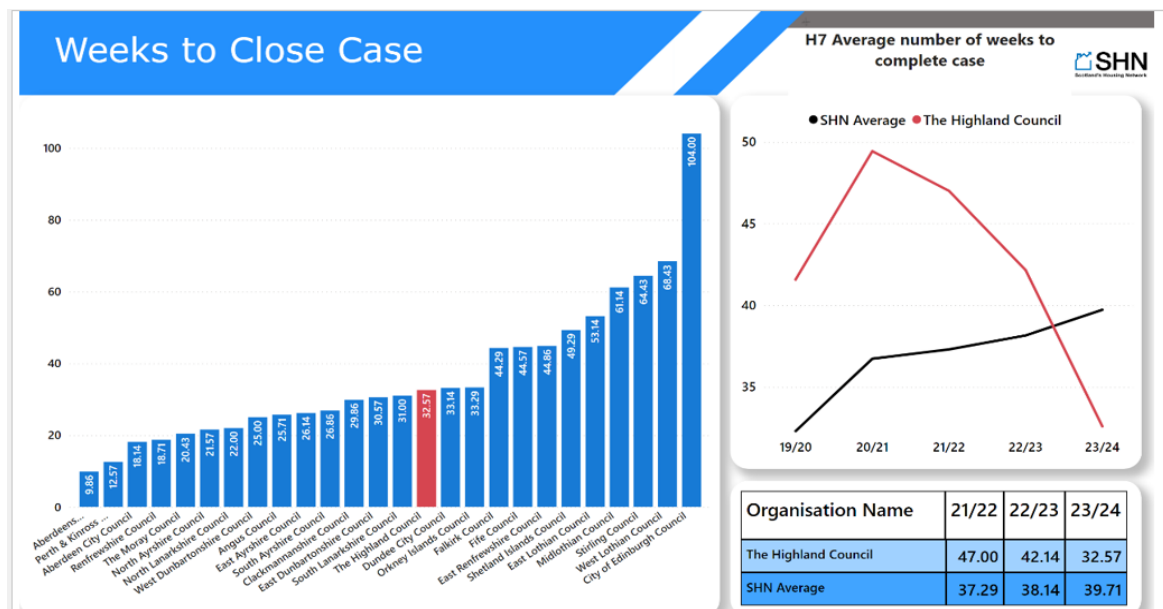
7 Rapid Rehousing

- 7.1 Since 2018, local authorities have had to submit Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans to Scottish Government and review these annually as part of the Strategic Housing Investment Plan.
- 7.2 Where homelessness cannot be prevented, Rapid Rehousing aims to:-
- secure a settled, mainstream housing outcome as quickly as possible;
 - minimise the time spent in any form of temporary accommodation, with as few transitions as possible; and
 - when temporary accommodation is needed, the optimum type is mainstream, furnished and within a community.
- 7.3 Highland Council has successfully integrated a Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan into daily service delivery which means all homeless applicants are rehoused as quickly as possible to ensure the time spent in temporary accommodation is kept to a minimum.
- 7.4 Local authorities must ensure they have provision of temporary accommodation available and to do this, homeless households must be rehoused as quickly as possible.
- 7.5 Where a temporary tenancy within the community meets the household needs and is a suitable option for them, we can convert these to mainstream secure tenancies to prevent the household from having to move.

8 Current Position and Highland performance

- 8.1 Highland Council's performance within homelessness has improved significantly in the past three years and there is a focus on continued improvement. This was acknowledged by the Scottish Housing Regulator at Highland's bi-annual engagement meeting with them in January 2025.
- 8.2 Priority for rehousing has focused on assisting households who have been in temporary accommodation for the longest period. As of 31 March 2025, there were 18 homeless cases older than 24 months. The length of time is due to very specific property type and location requirements, and where the applicants have additional needs and requirements which prove challenging to resolve within existing housing supply.

- 8.3 Highland Council work closely with agencies such as NHS, Adult Services, addiction services and mental health services and aim to provide sustainable settled rehousing outcomes for applicants and multi-agency working is imperative to achieving this.
- 8.4 The average time to resolve a homeless case in Highland is 32.57 weeks, which compares favourably to the national average of 39.71 weeks. In the context of the Highland Housing Challenge, Highland have reduced this figure considerably over the last three years in comparison to the national average which has steadily increased. This is highlighted in the below table from the Scottish Housing Network:-



- 8.5 One of the Service priorities is to minimise the length of time households with children spend in temporary accommodation. The average time spent in temporary accommodation for households with children was 25.93 weeks in 2023/24. This compares to the national average of 32.12 weeks. The 2024/25 statistics are awaiting release from the Scottish Government, as part of their annual verification process with local authorities.
- 8.6 As of 31 March 2025, there were 70 households with children in Highland in temporary accommodation. All temporary accommodation provided to these households is community-based, furnished and households are resettled into permanent outcomes as quickly as possible.
- 8.7 One of the ways in which Housing minimises the time spent in temporary accommodation is by prioritising allocations to households that we have a homeless duty to.

- 8.8 The below table shows the percentage of allocations to homeless households for the previous three years which is a key factor in reducing the time that people spend in temporary accommodation:-

Year	HHR landlords	Highland Council
2022/2023	47%	47%
2023/2024	50%	51%
2024/2025	53%	54%

- 8.9 Overall, allocations to homeless households across all Highland Housing Partners have slightly increased year on year which reflects the level of housing need and demand across Highland. Highland Council's allocations to applicants with homeless points have increased comparatively. The remaining allocations have been made to existing social housing tenants (transferring to another property) or applicants on the general housing register.

Most allocations made to applicants with homeless points on their housing applications also have Need to Reside points which highlights their need to remain in a specific area of Highland. This reflects local homeless demand and is further detailed in 8.10.

- 8.10 Most social housing properties in Highland are allocated to applicants who have a Need to Reside points award, as per the Highland Housing Register Allocations Policy. This ensures that allocations reflect the housing needs of applicants that need to reside in their community. The table below shows the percentages of allocations to all housing applicants with Need to Reside points for the previous three years:-

Year	HHR landlords	Highland Council
2022/2023	82%	82%
2023/2024	80%	81%
2024/2025	86%	87%

- 8.11 The reasons and causes of homelessness can be complex and involve a variety of circumstances. Whilst Highland Council focuses on homeless prevention the below table highlights some of the reasons and by the nature of those are difficult to prevent. The main three reasons for homeless presentations within Highland are:-

- applicants being asked to leave their accommodation;
- relationship breakdowns; and
- domestic abuse.

There is further detail on the reasons for homelessness presentations in Appendix 1 of the Housing Performance Report which is reported to this Committee.

9 National Policy Context

- 9.1 The Scottish Housing (Scotland) Bill was introduced in March 2024 and aims to enhance tenant rights, prevent homelessness and improve housing standards.
- 9.2 This Bill covers some of the commitments set out in Scottish Government's Housing to 2024 Strategy, including the development and implementation of a Domestic Abuse policy and a new homeless prevention duty.
- 9.3 Housing is currently preparing a Housing-specific domestic abuse policy to ensure that priority continues to be given under homelessness services and the Allocations Policy to applicants who have experienced domestic abuse. This policy will be submitted during 2025/26 to this Committee for approval.
- 9.4 The 'Ask and Act' homelessness prevention duty will require public bodies to proactively inquire about a person's housing situation and take action to avoid them becoming homeless. Local authorities have been involved in the consultation process around this duty and have voiced the requirement for clear guidance and sufficient resources to ensure the proposed duty builds on existing preventative work rather than results in additional pressures.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 23 April 2025

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Background Papers: None

Appendices: None