

Getting behind the homelessness statistics

Update for 2017-18

November 2018

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FOREWORD

Shelter Scotland helps over half a million people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness through our advice, support and legal services. And we campaign to make sure that, one day, no one will have to turn to us for help. We're here so that no one has to fight bad housing or homelessness on their own.

2018 marks 50 years since Shelter Scotland was founded, on the back of national outrage at the poor-quality housing in Scotland's cities. Legislation has come a long way in 50 years, and Scotland in particular has comparatively progressive laws around housing and homelessness.

Campaigning by Shelter Scotland and other organisations in the sector has seen homelessness and bad housing rise to prominence on the political agenda in recent years, and a number of commitments have been made to tackle the complex issues around homelessness. In 2016, the Scottish Government committed to building 50,000 affordable homes by 2021. Legislation was also passed that year to increase security of tenure for private renters, which then came into force in December 2017. The 2017-18 Programme for Government announced the creation of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group, and committed £50million towards ending homelessness.

Unfortunately, our work here at Shelter Scotland is still sorely needed; last year, 21,290 people came to us for help – more than ever before, and the number of people applying as homeless rose for the first time in nine years. Increasing cost of living, harsh welfare state policies and rising poverty levels are putting pressure on already vulnerable households.

CHAPTER 1: KEY POINTS

In Scotland, official homelessness statistics are collected when a household approaches their local authority to seek assistance via Housing Options or by making a homeless application. This data is released by the Scottish Government annually, and is the most accurate source of information with regards to homelessness in Scotland.

This paper provides an analysis of the government's official 2017-18 homelessness statistics¹ in order to get a clearer picture of who applies as homeless, the reasons behind their homelessness and the results of that application. Through this, we will recommend how the current political spotlight on homelessness can be turned into real, sustained change and improvements for those who find themselves to be homeless.

- In 2017-18, 34,972 households applied as homeless in Scotland. **This is a 1% rise on 2016-17; the first increase since 2008-09.** This small increase follows a levelling off of the rate of applications over the past few years, and shows that the impact of Housing Options in reducing homeless applications has stagnated.
- The increase in homeless applications has only been among certain groups; **single parents and single people.** For others – such as couples – applications have continued to decline.
- **14,075 children were in households assessed as homeless in 2017-18;** a marginal increase on the previous two years.
- **The pattern of homelessness is different amongst men and women depending on their age;** more young women up until the age of 25 apply than young men, but at 35 this trend reverses and more men than women apply as homeless.
- Certain groups are persistently overrepresented in homelessness statistics; young people, prison leavers, care leavers, and former members of the armed forces.
- **Both the number of households and the number of children in temporary accommodation have increased for the fourth year running,** up to 10,933 and 6,615 respectively. The latter is particularly salient given that the new data shows that households spend extended periods of time in temporary accommodation, and that households with children spend longer in temporary accommodation than those without (201 days compared to 161 days)².
- There is an increasing proportion of applicants, now accounting for 47% of all households assessed as homeless, who identify support needs, particularly relating to medical conditions and mental health conditions.
- Repeat homelessness cases constitute 6.4% of all households assessed as homeless. This is part of an increasing trend since 2009-10.
- The number of people recorded as approaching their local authority for help with housing outwith the homelessness system, through the service known as 'Housing Options', has declined since recording began in 2014-15, to 26,803 unique households in 2017-18.
- **Contact was lost on almost 1 in 5 occasions where a Housing Options approach was made.** This is concerning: Housing Options is intended to be a preventative housing

¹ Scottish Government (June 2018), [Homelessness in Scotland: 2017/18](#)

² Shelter Scotland (2018), [Topic briefing: Time in temporary accommodation 2018](#)

pathway, but cannot function as such if local authorities lose contact with those trying to access support.

- There is considerable variation among local authorities across all these statistics.
- **Homelessness and poor health are inextricably linked:** people who have experienced homelessness are more likely to have a higher level of interaction with health services, and are more likely to have one or more health conditions relating to drugs, alcohol and/or mental health. For people who experience homelessness more than once, the relationship between health visits, health problems and homelessness is even more pronounced.³
- It is important to remember that this data only reflects housing need among households who approach their local authority for help and are recorded as doing so; the true level of housing need is undoubtedly higher. A recent study estimated that 8% of the Scottish population had experienced homelessness at some point in their life⁴; this is an indicator of the large number of households who experience hidden homelessness, or other forms of housing need, who, for a variety of reasons, do not access services.

Key recommendations

1. This paper deals primarily with those who have made a homeless application via a local authority. As such the analysis is of those who have already reached crisis point, but it is crucial that homelessness and housing crises are prevented wherever possible. The only way to substantively improve the picture of homelessness in Scotland is to prevent it happening.
2. **Time spent in temporary accommodation** should be kept to a minimum, and new enforceable standards should be introduced to ensure that temporary accommodation, where its use is necessary, provides a positive stepping stone into permanent accommodation.
3. It is vital that local authorities are held to account and supported to reduce the practice of housing people in unsuitable accommodation, particularly in instances where it is illegal – for instance, extended stays in bed and breakfast accommodation.
4. Shelter Scotland recommends local authorities take action to reduce the proportion of outcomes in both Housing Options and homelessness services in which **contact is lost** with a household.
5. Given the specific difficulties they face, Shelter Scotland's view is that there should be targeted assistance for **young people** facing homelessness.
6. More consideration is needed to tackle the **gendered nature of homelessness**.
7. Shelter Scotland recommends increased prevention activities in groups that are consistently overrepresented in homelessness statistics, such as **care leavers, prison leavers, and former members of the armed forces**. We would like to see cross-portfolio consideration of how existing systems make individuals from these backgrounds more likely to experience homelessness.

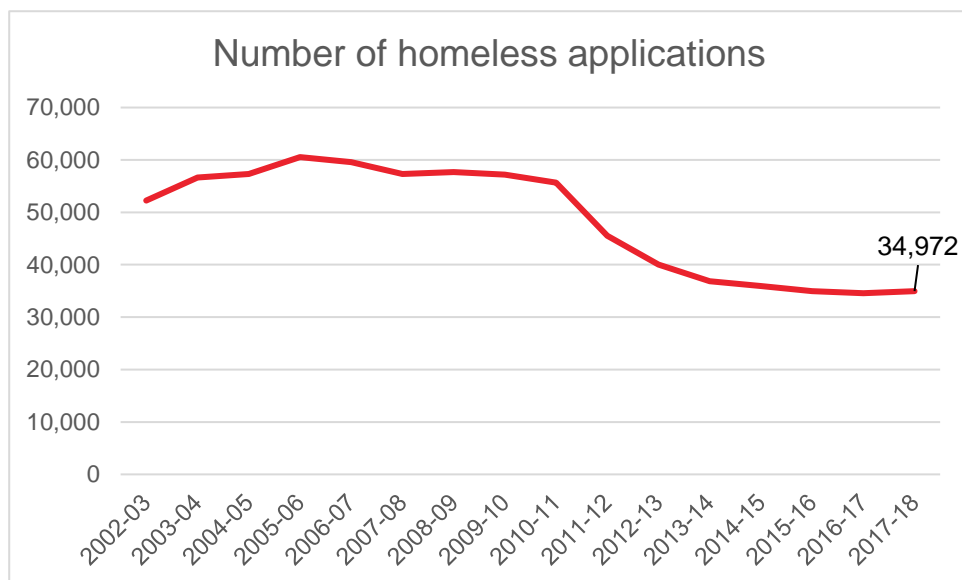
³ Shelter Scotland (2018), [Topic briefing: Health and homelessness 2018](#)

⁴ Waugh et al with the Scottish Government (2018) [Health and Homelessness in Scotland: research](#)

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8. A consistent proportion of households assessed as homeless go on to make a **repeat homeless application** within the same year. This makes a clear case for support from local authorities to be sustained for a longer period post-assessment.
 9. The long-awaited **Housing Options toolkit** should be implemented as soon as possible. The need for guidance and training was first recognised by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) in 2014 and the Scottish Government committed to producing a toolkit in 2016.
 10. There should be continuing efforts to raise awareness of Private Rented Sector **tenants' rights** under the new legislation, as well as enforcement of the new legislation and continued scrutiny of its effects.
 11. Consideration is needed of how **mental health issues** can affect an individual's ability to engage with services at a delivery level.
 12. Shelter Scotland recommends the **removal of the benefit cap**, that the rollout of **Universal Credit is paused**, and an **end to the freeze on Local Housing Allowance**, to prevent more households become homeless.
 13. There should be an increased focus on the nuances of housebuilding delivery to ensure that **the right homes are being built where they are needed**, as well as affordable house building commitments that extend beyond 2021.

CHAPTER 2: HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE HOMELESS IN SCOTLAND?

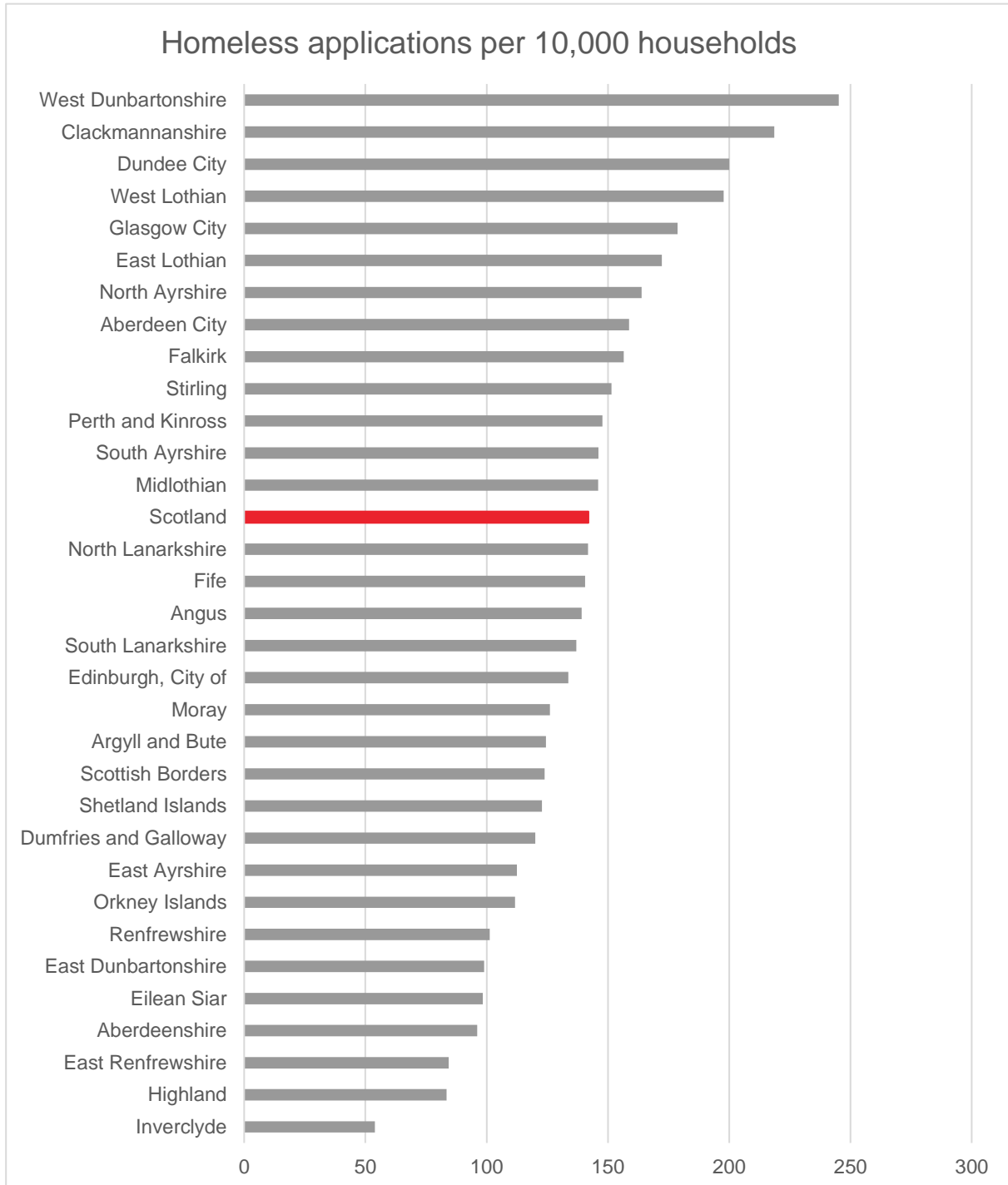
Applications



- In 2017-18, 34,972 homeless applications were made to local authorities in Scotland. This represents a 1% increase (or 402 applications) compared to 2016-17. Future years' data is needed to confirm whether this slight upward move is part of a longer upward trend, or if the otherwise stable line will continue.
- As seen in the graph above, there was a decrease in applications after 2009-10, which then began to level out from 2014-15 onwards. The fact that this year's data represents a slight increase implies that the steep decline in applications seen between 2010-2011 and 2013-14 was due to the impact of Housing Options, rather than any improvements in tackling the underlying causes of homelessness.
- The overall 1% increase is not spread evenly across Scotland: 15 local authorities logged decreases in applications, while 17 logged increases.
 - The biggest **increases** in applications compared to 2016-17 were seen in North Ayrshire (27%), Perth and Kinross (17%) and Aberdeen City (13%). For Aberdeen City this marks part of a rising trend since 2015-16, while the increases in North Ayrshire and Perth & Kinross seem to reverse previously downward trends.
 - The most notable **decreases** were in East Dunbartonshire (-17%), Highland (-13%), Inverclyde (-13%, although small numbers here mean this is only a drop of approx. 30 applications), and Edinburgh (-12%).
- By calculating rates of homelessness⁵, we can compare the levels of homeless applications in different local authorities of different sizes.

⁵ Calculated using local authority household figures from National Records of Scotland: [Estimates of Households and Dwellings in Scotland, 2017](#)

- West Dunbartonshire (245 applications per 10,000 households), Clackmannanshire (219 per 10,000 households), and Dundee (200 per 10,000 households) have the highest rates of homelessness.
- Inverclyde has by far the lowest rate of homelessness, at 54 applications per 10,000 households.



Assessments

- 28,792 households were assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness in 2017-18. This represents 82% of all applications; a figure which has been relatively stable over the past five years.
- These 28,792 households contained 28,999 adults and 14,075 children.⁶ See chapter 5 for further analysis on characteristics of people who are homeless.
- Some local authorities have assessment rates which deviate significantly from this 82% average:
 - Edinburgh and Midlothian record many more applicants as homeless than the average for the past 5 years. Edinburgh's rate (now at 96%) has consistently been the highest of all local authorities.
 - Despite large increases in the past year, Moray and Stirling still log the lowest proportion of applicants as homeless, at 68% and 71% respectively. They have been the lowest for the past 3 years, despite being the only local authorities to have recorded large increases in the percentages of applications assessed as homeless; both up by 7% since 2016-17.
- Other local authorities have recorded big decreases in their assessment rates:
 - North Ayrshire, which has seen a 27% increase in numbers of applications since 2016-17, has recorded a 10% decrease in the percentage of applications which are assessed as homeless or unintentionally homeless.
 - Inverclyde, which has seen a 15% decrease in numbers of applications since last year, has recorded a 13% decrease in the percentage of applications which are assessed as homeless or unintentionally homeless.
 - Both North Ayrshire and Inverclyde now record assessment rates similar to the national average, at 80% and 79% respectively. This could suggest that practices are being adjusted to bring assessment rates in line with the national figure.
- It is hard to draw firm conclusions as to why a particular local authority has a variance in assessment rate from the national average without knowledge of their operating processes.
- In the course of assessing a household's homelessness, the local authority also considers whether they are 'intentionally' homeless, i.e. if the household has deliberately done or not done something that caused them to leave accommodation that they could otherwise have stayed in and which would have been reasonable for them to stay in. This limits the local authority's duty to provide support; once a household has been assessed as intentionally homeless, the local authority only has a duty to provide advice and assistance and temporary accommodation if required for a reasonable period. 1551 households, or 5.4% of all homeless or threatened with homeless assessments, were assessed as 'intentionally' homeless in 2017-18.

⁶ This figure was provided via an information request to the Scottish Government statistics team by Shelter Scotland. Shelter Scotland (2018), [Topic briefing: Children experiencing homelessness](#)

CHAPTER 3: WHO IS HOMELESS IN SCOTLAND?

Household type

- The 28,792 households that were assessed as homeless in 2017-18 contained 28,999 unique adults and 14,075 unique children⁷.
 - The number of households assessed as homeless (-0.06%) and the number of unique children in those households (+0.67%) has remained fairly stable since 2016-17, whilst the number of unique adults in those homeless households has decreased by 5.89%. This implies a rise in single person households assessed as homeless, and/or an increase in the number of children per adult in households assessed as homeless.
- Data showing household type is only available for homeless applications, rather than homeless assessments. This data shows the following changes in household types applying as homeless compared to 2016-17:

Single-parent household	Single person	Couple without children	Couple with children	Other without children	Other with children
▲ 2.1%	▲ 1.2%	▼ -5.24%	▼ -5.69%	▲ 8.30%	▲ 9.37%

- The rise in single parent households is part of a longer trend: there has been a 4% rise in single parent households applying as homeless since 2015-16. Presuming a similar household breakdown across homeless applications and assessments, this is in line with the increasing children per adult suggested by the figures above.

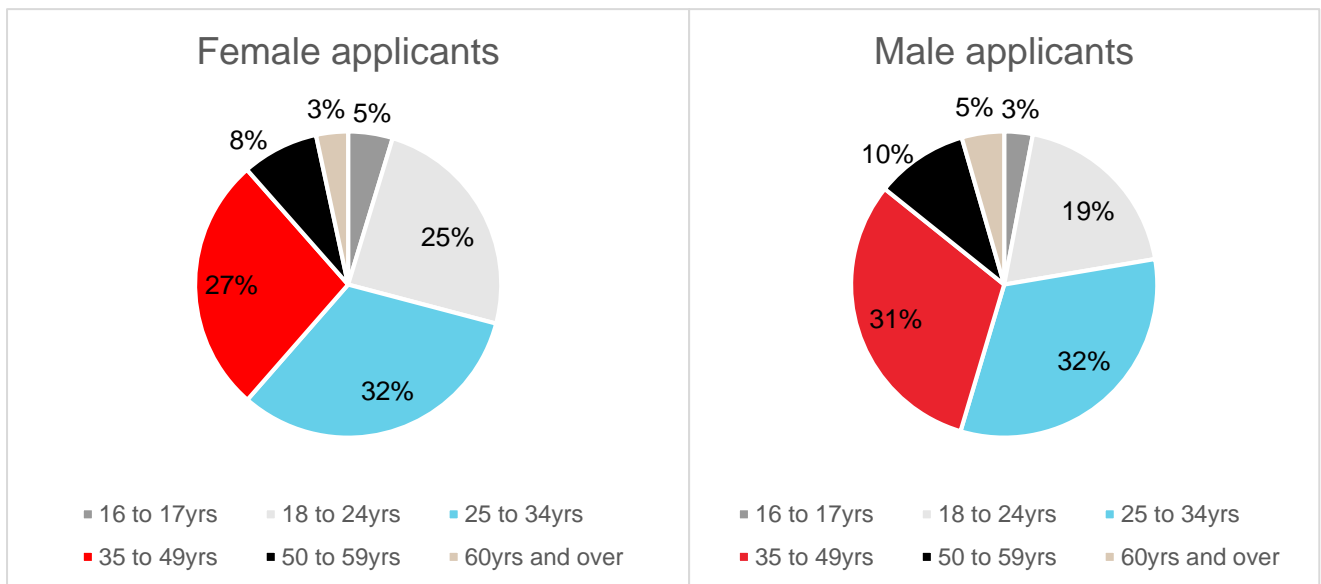
Gender

- 55% of homeless applicants were male and 45% were female.⁸ This distribution has not changed since 2012-13.
- The applicant breakdown by gender and age shows that more young women apply as homeless than young men; 16-24 year olds make up 29% of all female applications compared to 22% of all male applications.
 - In 2010-11, 10,845 women under 25 applied as homeless (accounting for 42% of all female applications) compared to 8,746 men under 25 (29% of all male applications). In 2017-18, 4,616 women under 25 applied as homeless (29% of all female applications), compared to 4,268 men under 25 (22% of all male applications): The pattern in gender disparity is converging.

⁷ This information was obtained through a statistics request by Shelter Scotland to the Scottish Government.

⁸ The HL1 return does not have separate categories for transgender or non-binary applicants.

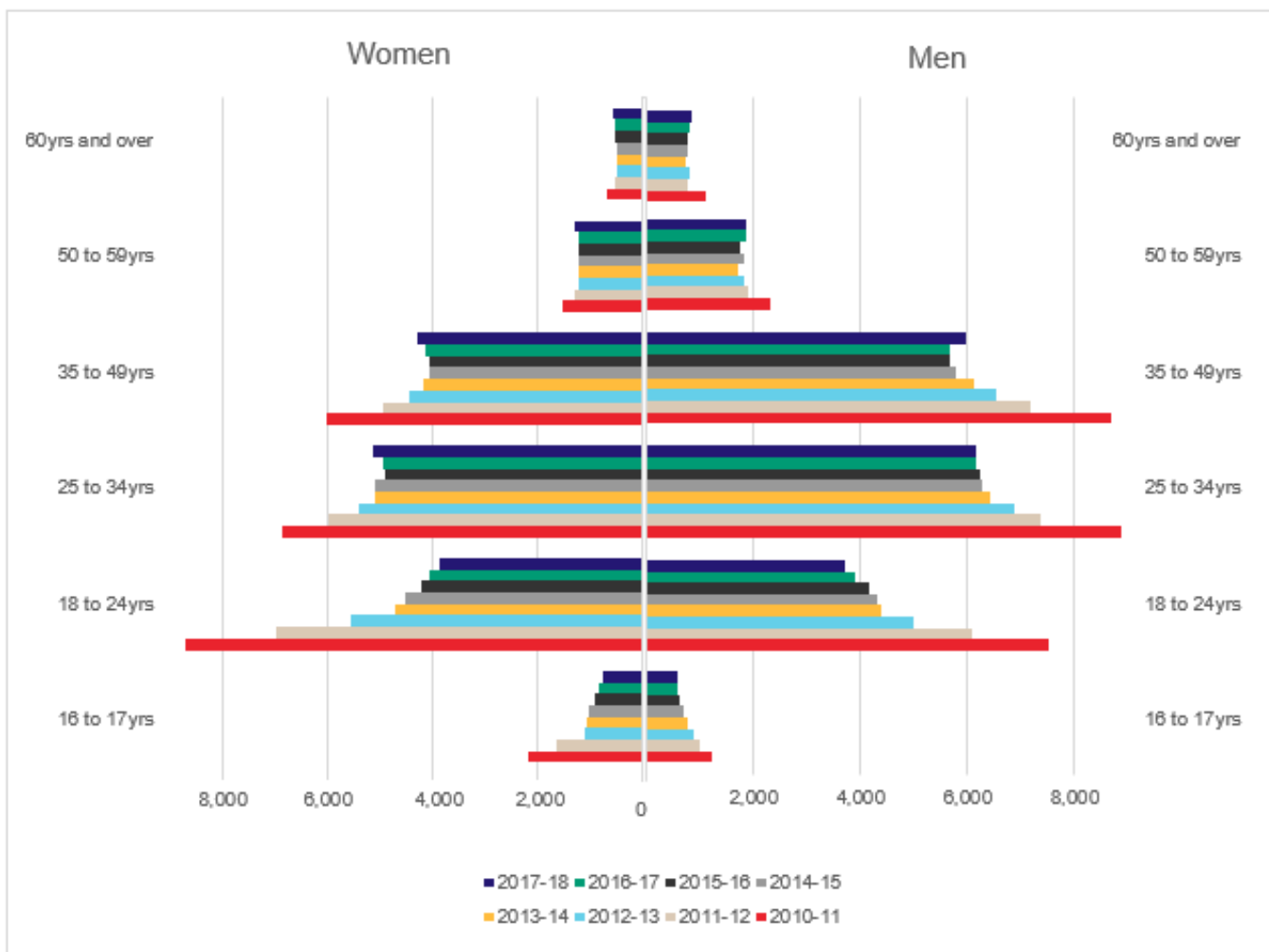
- Interestingly, between the ages of 25 and 35, rates of homelessness between men and women equalise, accounting for 32% of each gender's applications. However, after the age of 35, more men apply as homeless than women, as can be seen in the charts below. The gender gap here is not narrowing.



Age

- Young people are overrepresented in the homelessness statistics. Youth homelessness (where the main applicant in the household is aged 24 or under at the time of application) accounts for 25% of all homeless applications. Across Scotland, 11.7 in every 1000 individuals aged 16-24 are homeless, compared to 5.3 in every 1000 individuals aged 25 or over⁹.
- The highest numbers of both men and women who apply as homeless fall into the 25-34 age bracket; this makes up 32% of both gender's total applications.
- The number of over 60s applying as homeless makes up 8% of all applications and has increased from 1,206 in 2013-14 to 1,391 in 2017-18, despite the total number of applications decreasing in this time.

⁹ Scottish Government (2018), [Youth Homelessness 2017/18 \(Ad-hoc analysis\)](#)



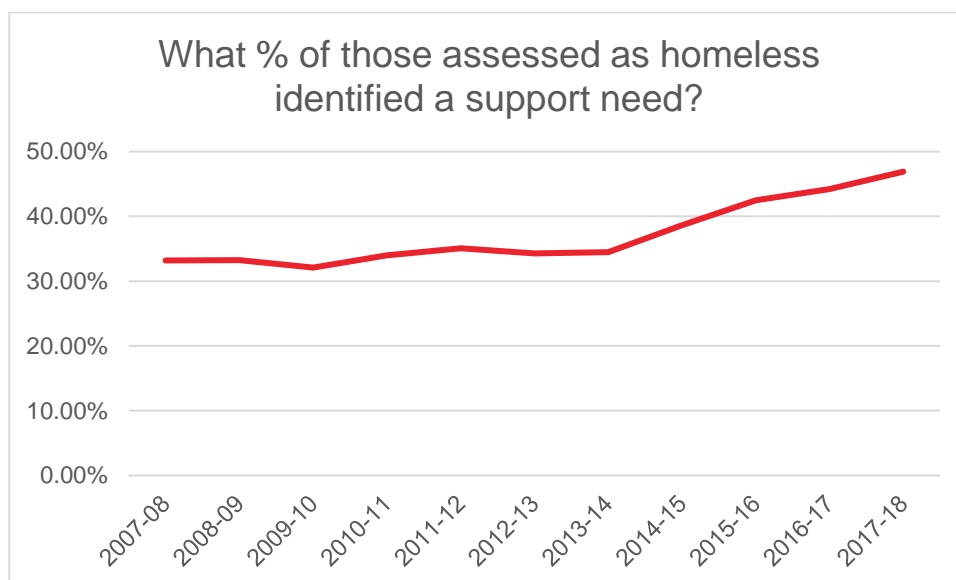
Ethnicity

- 77% of all homeless applicants were white Scottish. The next most common ethnicity of applicants was white 'other British', at 6%. All other identified ethnicities accounted for 3% or less of applicants. For 5% of applicants, ethnicity was not known or information was not given.
 - Using data on ethnicity from the Scottish Household Survey¹⁰, the only groups that could be considered to be overrepresented in the homelessness data are those of African ethnicities (who make up 1.1% of homeless applications, compared to 0.5% of the general population), those of Caribbean or Black ethnicities (who make up 0.5% of homeless applications, compared to 0.1% of the general population), and those whose ethnicity fell into the 'Other Ethnic Group' category (who make up 3.8% of homeless applications, compared to 0.9% of the general population).
- The biggest increase since 2016-17 is in the 'Not Known/refused' category, which has increased by 27% (or 399 households).

¹⁰ Scottish Government (2018), [Scotland's People Annual Report from the 2017 Scottish Household Survey](#)

Additional Support Needs

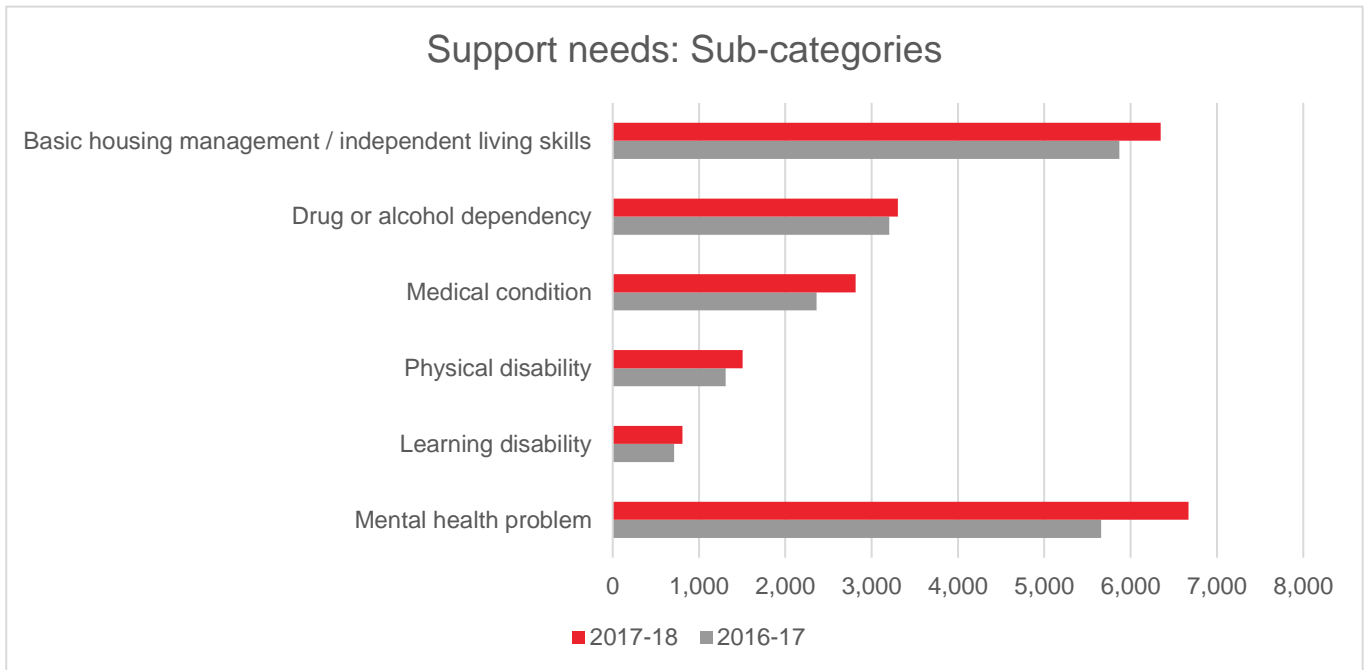
- 13,504 households assessed as homeless were identified as having one or more additional support need, which is 47% of all households assessed as homeless¹¹. More homeless households are now recorded as having a support need; the figure has increased by 6.8% since 2016-17.
- The data is unable to show whether this national and sustained rise in support needs can be attributed to an actual rise in their number, or due to increased awareness either on behalf of the applicant (people are more aware of their additional needs) or on behalf of the councils (local authorities are getting better at identifying additional needs) or policy and practice change.
 - The below chart, showing the percentage of those assessed as homeless who identified at least one additional support need, notes a steepening of the rising trend in 2013-14. This was the year that local authorities were first required to assess the support needs of homeless applicants; this change in the trend therefore suggests that at least part of the trend can be attributed to a change in authorities' processes.¹²



- The most common support need recorded by households assessed as homeless is a mental health condition (6,672, or 49% of households), shortly followed by independent living skills (6,348, or 47% households). However, the biggest increase since 2016-17 was seen in the number of households who recorded a medical condition, which increased by 19%.

¹¹ Please note that statistics relating to age, gender and ethnicity statistics concern homeless applications, whereas those relating to Additional Support Needs concern households assessed as homeless or at risk of homelessness only.

¹² The Housing Support Services (Homelessness)(Scotland) Regulations 2012 came into force on 1st June 2013 and require Local Authorities to assess whether some persons assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness need housing support services.



- Multiple support needs can be recorded for a single household. There has been an increase in both the overall number of households identifying a support need, and the number of support needs identified by those households. In 2007-08, there was an average of 1.38 support needs per household (among those who identified at least one). In 2017-18, there was an average of 1.59 support needs per household.
- Households with at least one additional support need identified now make up 47% of all assessments, an all-time high and up from 33% in 2007-08. However, this figure varies between local authorities:
 - South Ayrshire (95%), Falkirk (86%) and Inverclyde (80%) all record particularly high levels of households assessed as homeless with at least one additional support need.
 - Perth & Kinross (16%), Midlothian (18%), and Aberdeenshire (24%) all record particularly low levels of households assessed as homeless with at least one additional support need.

Particular groups

- Some groups are more likely to make a homeless application than the general population.
- The level of homeless applications from people who have been formerly looked after by the local authority still stands at 6% of all applications (or 1,347), as it has been for the past 4 years. To put this into perspective, 4,274 children (of all ages) left care in 2017.
 - There is not much difference in the likelihood of someone making a homeless application depending on how long they have been out of care: 46% of all applications from care-experienced people are made within 5 years of leaving care, and 54% are made after 5 years. These figures have fluctuated either side of the 50% mark for the past 6 years.

- 5% (1,845) of all homeless applications are from people who recorded their previous accommodation as prison. This has decreased by 102 applications since 2016-17.
- 3% (889) of all homeless applications are submitted by a previous member of the armed services. This figure has increased by 11% (88 applications) since 2016-17. Before this, the figure had been steadily decreasing since 2008-09.
 - Unlike care-experienced applicants, former members of the armed forces are more likely to make an application after 5 or more years of having left service: over 3 times as many applications were made 5 or more years after having left the armed forces compared to within 5 years. This suggests that there is a need for existing support available upon discharge from the armed services to be extended for a longer period.

Rough sleeping

- Actual levels of rough sleeping are difficult to measure, and current official measures of rough sleeping do not show the whole picture. When making a homeless application, the applicant is asked whether they (or a member of the household) have slept rough at any point in the past 3 months, or slept rough the previous night. They are also asked to record their previous accommodation, for which one option is 'long term roofless'. However, these figures only record those who make a homeless application, and are therefore far from an accurate measure of the level of rough sleeping in Scotland.
 - 2,862 applicants were recorded as having slept rough at least once in the past 3 months; similar to the figure in 2016-17.
 - 1,357 applicants were recorded as having slept rough the night prior to making their application; this is a slight decrease compared to 2016-17.
 - Both these measures have been decreasing over the past 15 years, **although that decrease has slowed over the past 3 years.**
- The level of rough sleeping is extremely varied across local authorities. It is possible to pull out certain trends in individual local authorities, but in many instances the numbers become so small that the changes are not statistically robust.
 - In South Ayrshire and West Lothian there have been large increases in levels of rough sleeping both the night before and in the 3-month period before making a homeless application.

	During the past 3 months			The night before		
	2016-17	2017-18	Change	2016-17	2017-18	Change
Scotland	2660	2682	+1%	1563	1537	-2%
South Ayrshire	35	130	+271%	5	60	+1100%
West Lothian	95	165	+74%	65	115	+77%

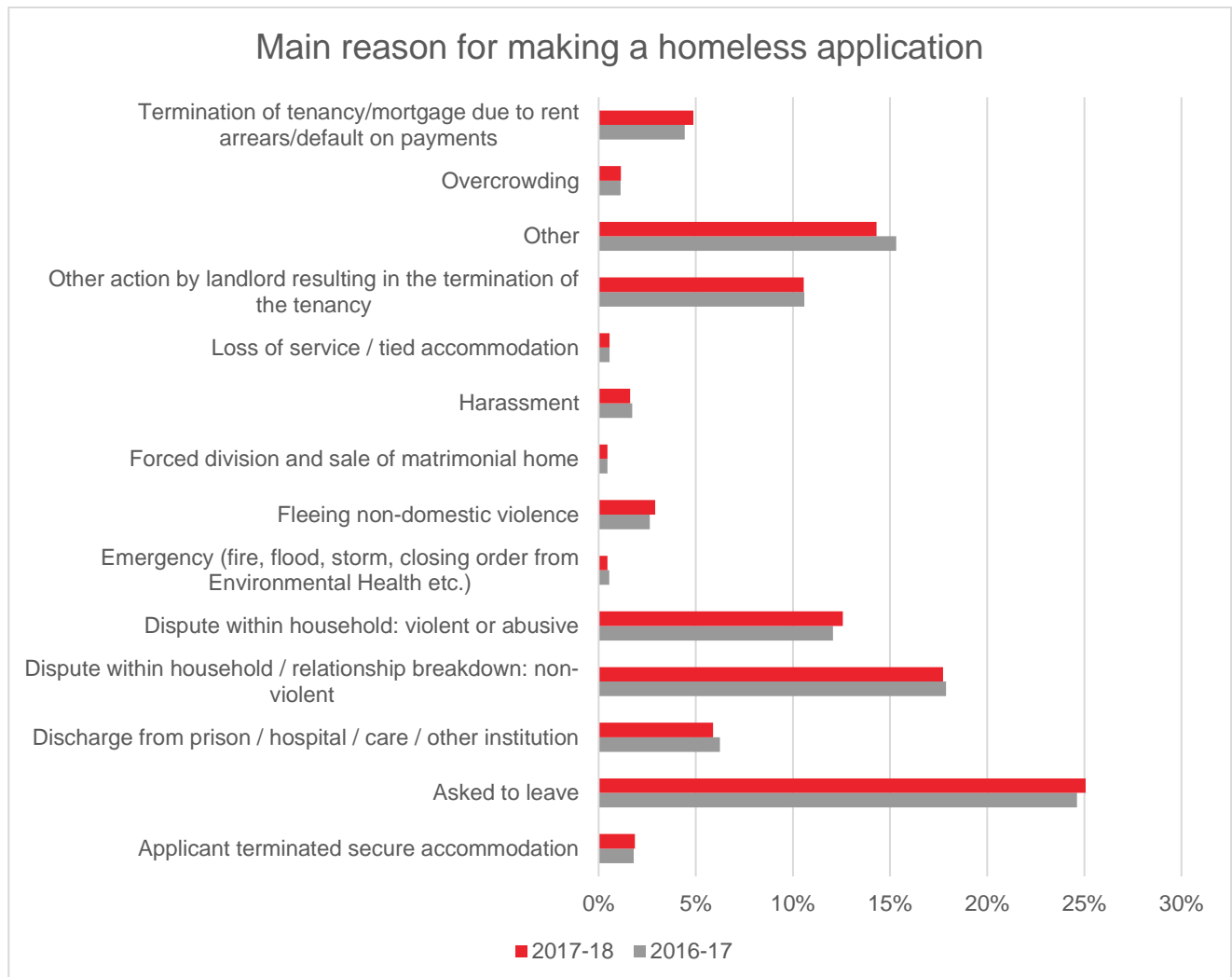
- In terms of urban areas, in Aberdeen and Dundee there have been decreases in levels of rough sleeping before making a homeless application, while in Edinburgh and Glasgow there have been increases in the last year.
- 185 applicants reported their previous accommodation as 'long-term roofless'. There is clearly a disparity between this figure and the number of applicants who slept rough the night before making a homeless application. This shows that a significant number of applicants are resorting to sleeping rough prior to making a homeless application as a temporary measure, and do not see it as their accommodation.

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- Improved out of hours support could prevent people in crisis situations having to resort to sleeping rough while they wait to access support.

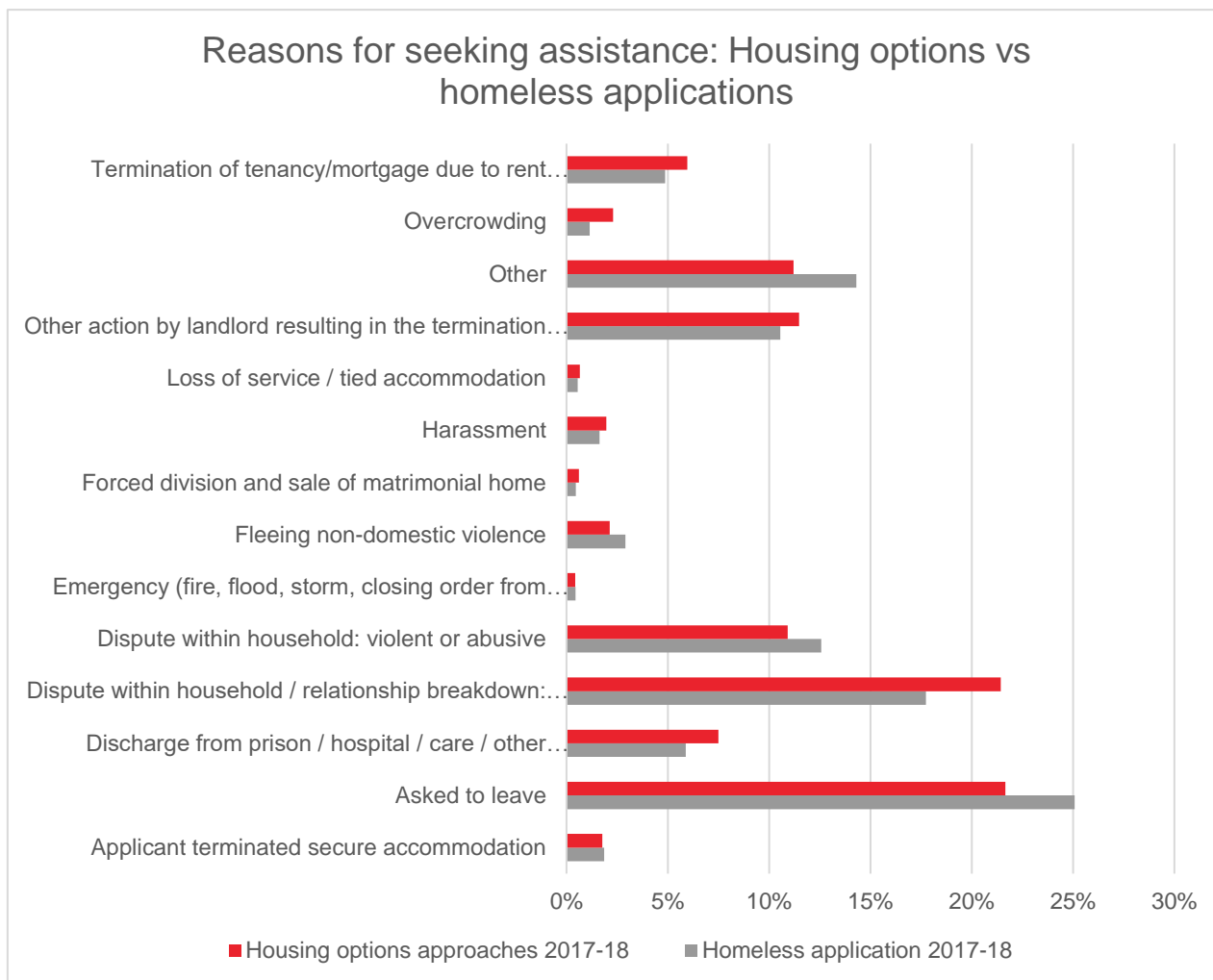
CHAPTER 4: WHY ARE PEOPLE HOMELESS IN SCOTLAND?

Why did people apply as homeless?

- Being 'asked to leave' is still the most common reason given for making a homeless application, making up one quarter of all applications.
- The main reasons for applying as homeless remain similar to those given in 2016-17:



- The categories given in homeless applications correspond with some of the categories¹³ that can be recorded when making a Housing Options approach. We can therefore compare the two to see the types of housing issues dealt with through the two pathways.

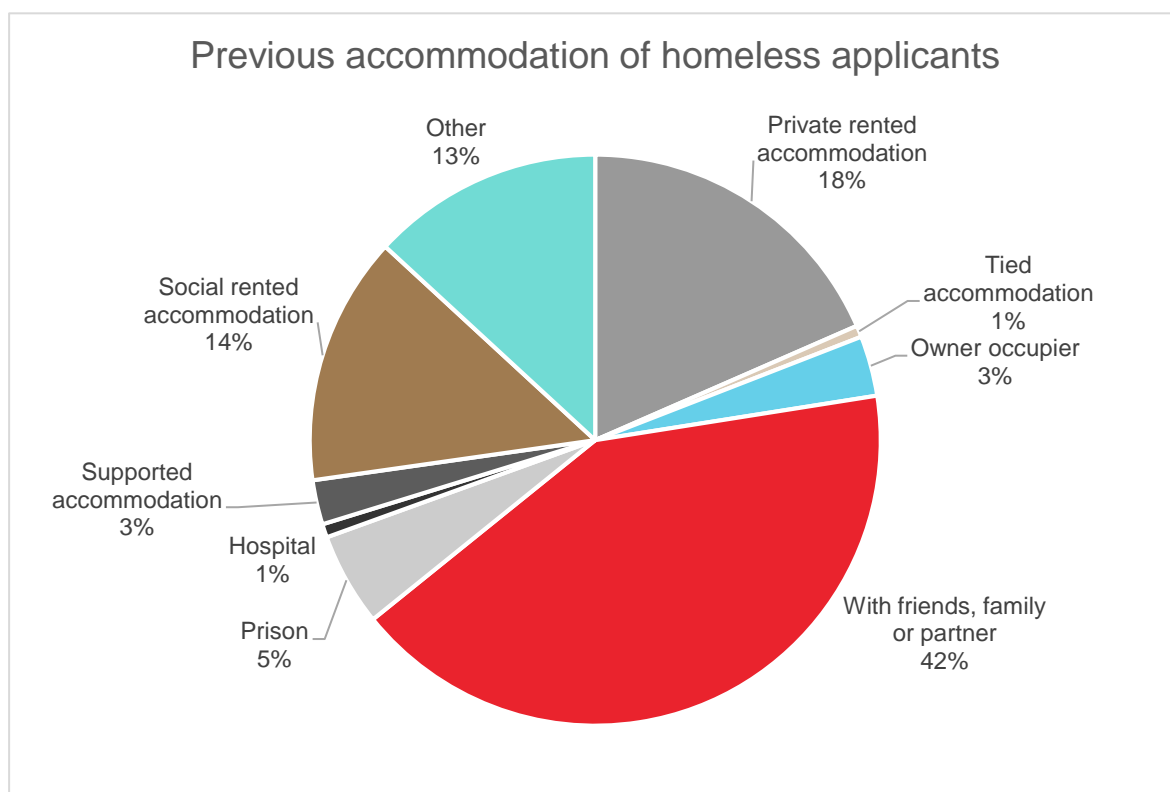


- Whether or not this variation in methods of assistance is down to signposting by the council or choice of the individual/household, we cannot tell from the data. This will likely depend on how the services are run, which varies between local authorities. By law, if a local authority has reason to believe that a household is homeless or threatened with homelessness, it must accept a homeless applicant from the household. **It is also important to remember that one household can make a Housing Options approach and a homeless application, and therefore appear in both datasets.**
 - We can see that people are more likely to be directed to make a homeless application if they are asked to leave, or in situations of violence. In all other situations, they are more likely to be assisted via Housing Options. This is the same as in the 2016-17 dataset.
 - See more about reasons for making a Housing Options approach in Chapter 7.

¹³ Those within the 'homelessness type reasons'. See more in Chapter 7 on Housing Options.

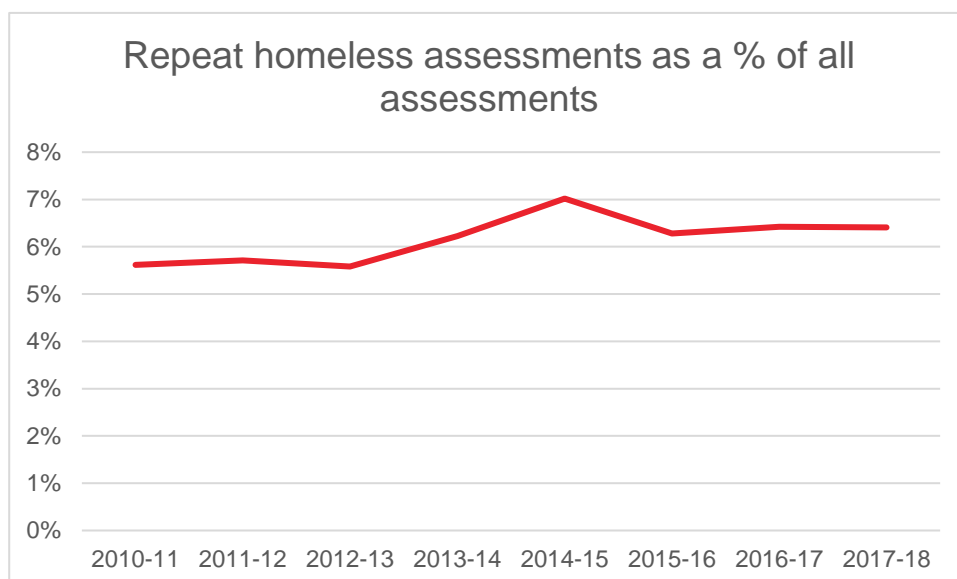
Where did people stay prior to applying as homeless?

- 42% of households who apply as homeless list their previous accommodation as having been staying with friends, family or partner. The next most common accommodation types are the private rented sector (18% of applicants) and social rented sector (14% of applicants). There has been little change since 2016-17 in the previous accommodation listed when households make a homeless application.
 - Those who list social rented accommodation as their previous accommodation have increased by 1% since 2016-17, which continues an increasing trend.
 - Households from the private rented sector are overrepresented in the figures. There has been no change in this since 2016-17, but new legislation strengthening security of tenure in the private rented sector may mean the number of people making a homeless application from private rented accommodation decreases in subsequent years.



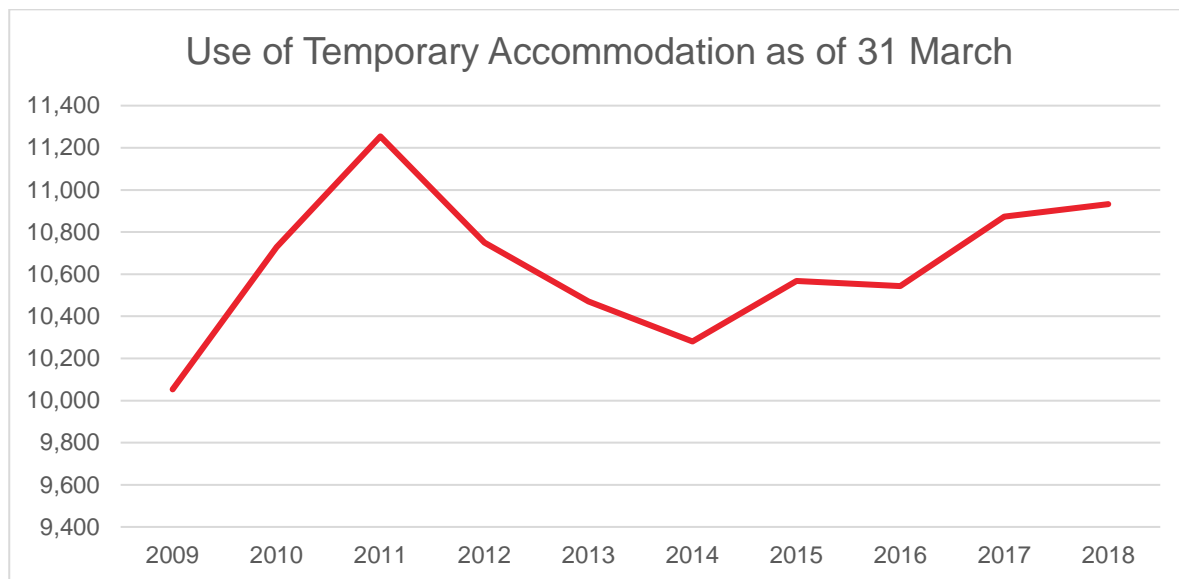
Repeat homelessness

- In 2017-18, 1,845 households were re-assessed as homeless within the same year: **this accounts for 6.4% of all homeless assessments**. There has been a general increasing trend since 2010-11 in terms of repeat assessments as a proportion of all assessments; in 2010-11 there were 2,355 repeat assessments which made up 5.6% of all homeless assessments.



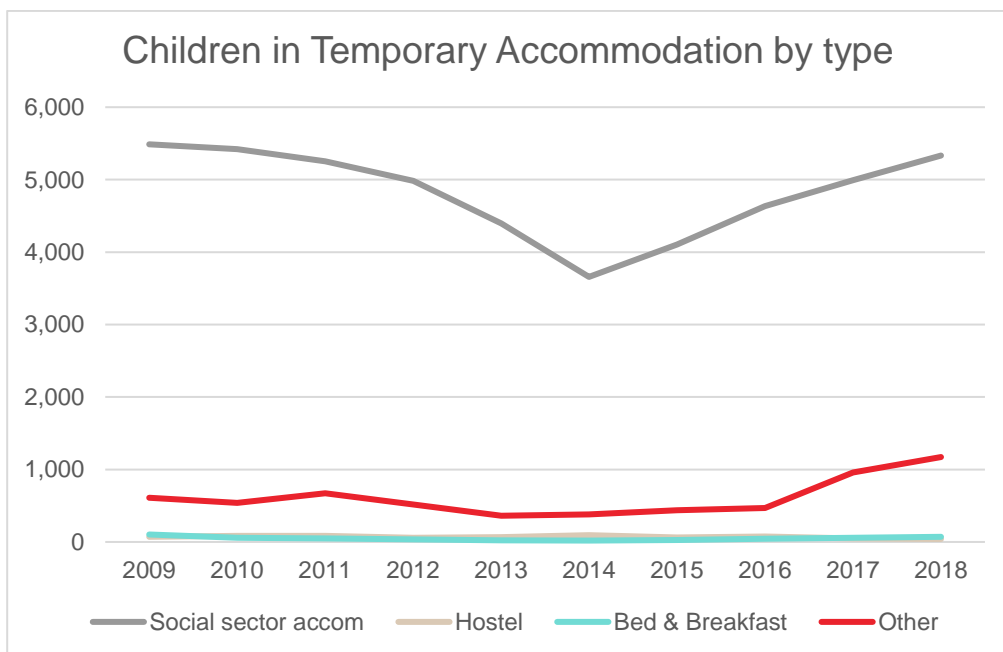
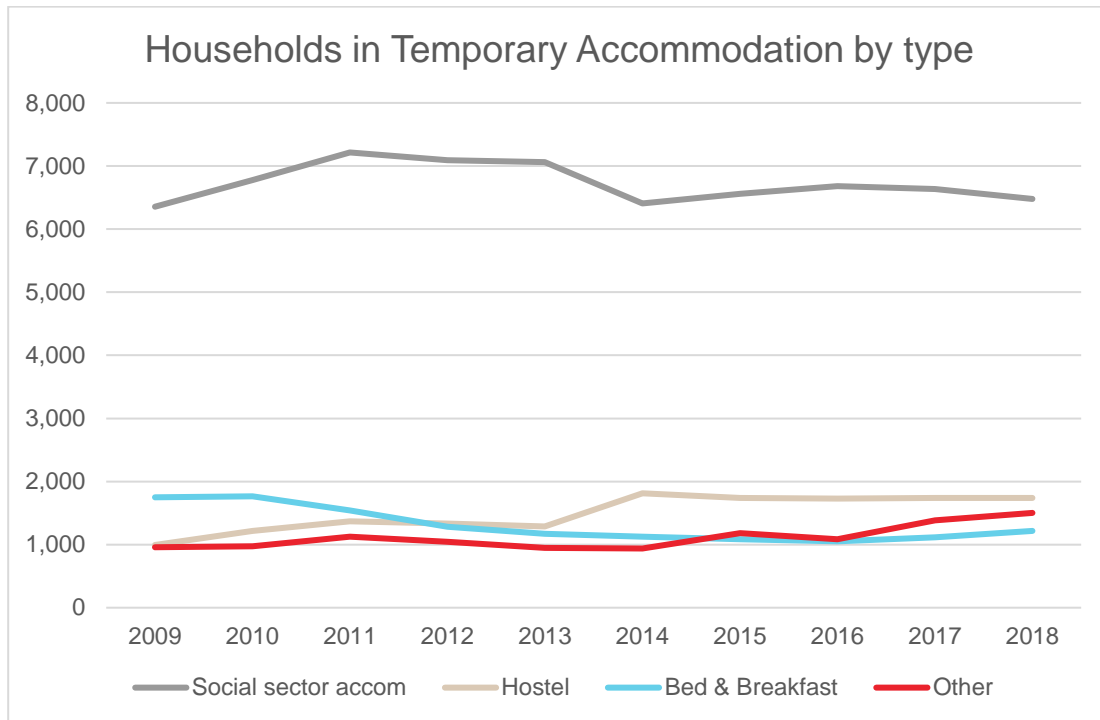
- The highest levels of repeat homelessness were recorded in Inverclyde, where households re-assessed as homeless within the same year accounted for 13.3% of all assessments. Other high levels were seen in Glasgow (10.9%), Dumfries and Galloway (10.9%). However, this data should be treated with caution, as in some local authorities the number of households re-assessed as homeless is incredibly small.

CHAPTER 5: TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION



- On 31st March 2018, there were 10,933 households in temporary accommodation. This is an increase of 1% (or 60 households) compared to the same time in 2016-17. As we can see from the graph above, it continues the rising trend since 2014.
 - The biggest increases were seen in West Lothian (22% increase on last year) and Clackmannanshire (25%).
 - The biggest decrease in use of temporary accommodation on this date was in Dumfries & Galloway (-20%).
 - Of all households in temporary accommodation in Scotland, 1 in 8 are in Edinburgh, and nearly 1 in 5 are in Glasgow. These numbers are disproportionately high, even given the levels of households assessed as homeless in these areas, and are increasing far quicker than the national rate.
- The number of households containing a child or pregnant person who were in temporary accommodation on 31st March 2018 also increased since 2017, **rising by 118 households or 4%** to a total of 3,349. The total number of children in temporary accommodation on this date was 6,615, which is a 9% increase since 2017.
- There has been increases in the use of hostels and accommodation in the 'Other' category (which refers to women's refuges and other accommodation not owned by the local authority¹⁴) and in particular the use of this accommodation has more than doubled since 2014 for households with children:

¹⁴ Scottish Government (2015), [Temporary Accommodation Categories](#)

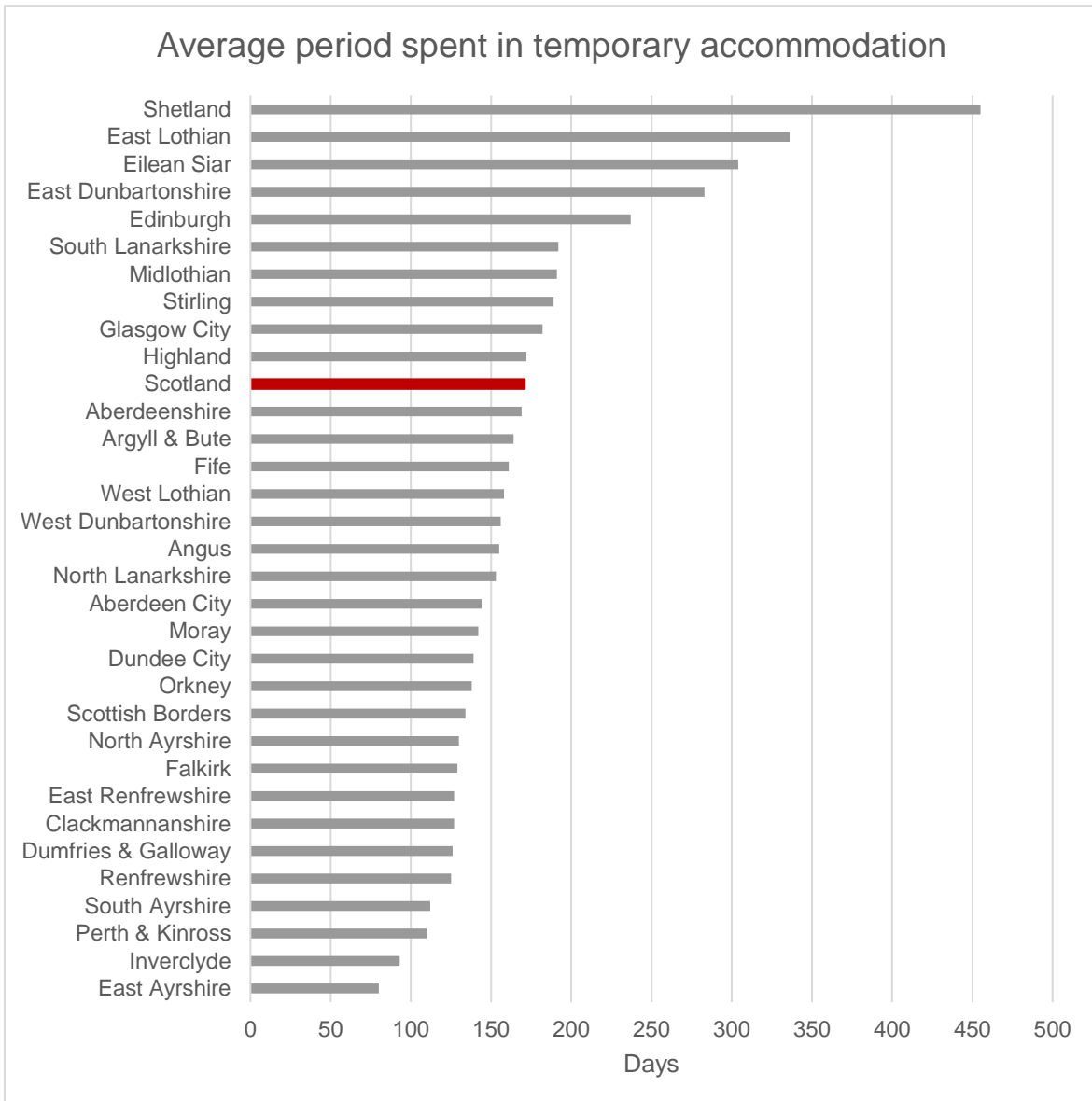


Length of time spent in temporary accommodation

- A new dataset, known as the HL3, was released in 2017-18. It gives insight into the use of temporary accommodation from each household's perspective, rather than a count on one

day of the year. It provides valuable information about the length of time spent in temporary accommodation **for households who left temporary accommodation in 2017-18**.¹⁵

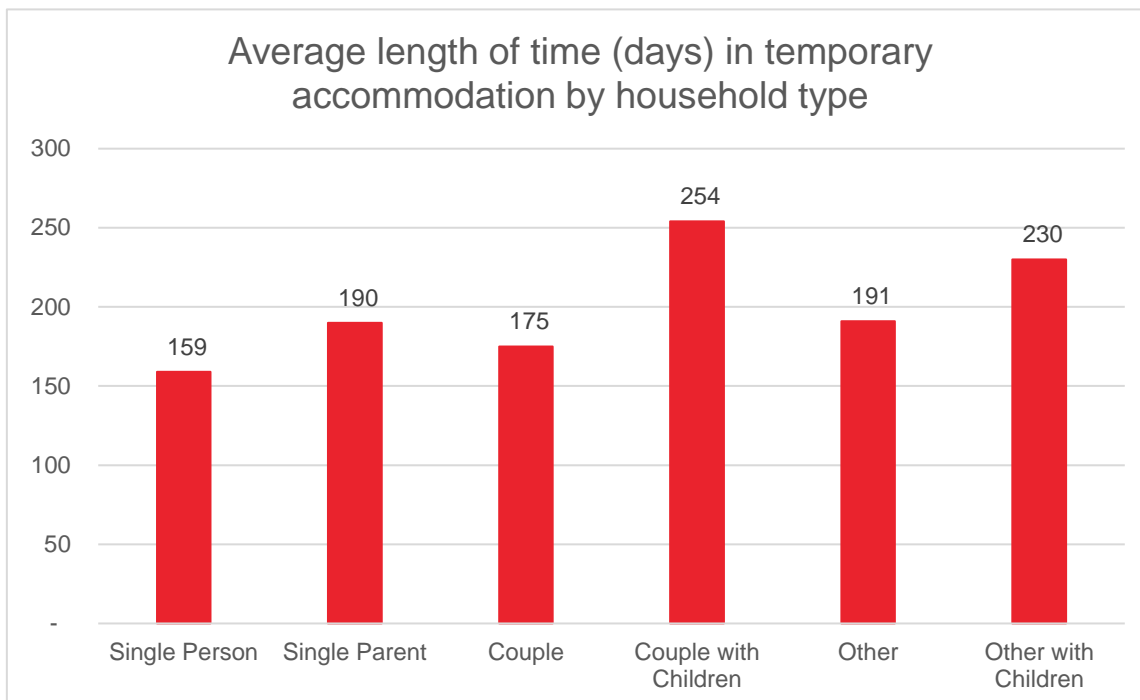
- Thousands of households depend on temporary accommodation for extended lengths of time; **on average, households in Scotland spent 171 days** (just under 6 months) in temporary accommodation in 2017-18. 13% of households spent more than a year in temporary accommodation.¹⁶
 - On average, households spent the longest periods in temporary accommodation in Shetland, East Lothian, Eilean Siar, East Dunbartonshire, and Edinburgh. This shows the effect of a lack of affordable housing, which has led to a ‘bottleneck’ of households stuck in temporary accommodation.



¹⁵ The Scottish Government dataset notes that “Highland is the only local authority with a large share of HL3 placements without a corresponding HL1, thus all figures provided for this local authority are provisional and will be subject to change”. For this reason, data concerning Highland should be treated with caution.

¹⁶ Shelter Scotland (2018), [Time in temporary accommodation](#).

- Households containing children spend longer in temporary accommodation than those without children: an average of 204 days compared to 161.
 - Couples with children spent, on average, 254 days in temporary accommodation; longer than any other household type.



- The largest variation in time spent in temporary accommodation was seen in couples with children, and households categorised as 'other with children'. The smallest variation in time spent in temporary accommodation was seen among single people and couples without children.
- In 2017, the Unsuitable Accommodation Order (UAO) was amended to reduce the amount of time that households containing children or a pregnant person can be housed in unsuitable accommodation from 14 days to 7 days. This change came into effect on 2nd October 2017.
 - Newly published temporary accommodation data shows 400 breaches of the UAO in 2017-18. This is in line with the experience of Shelter Scotland advisers.
 - Of these 400 breaches, 280 occurred in Edinburgh, 65 occurred in West Lothian, and 20 in East Dunbartonshire. 22 local authorities didn't report a single breach of the UAO, while the other 7 each recorded less than 10.
 - Unfortunately, we cannot compare this data to previous years, in which only snapshot figures were available.

CHAPTER 6: WHAT HAPPENED AFTER HOUSEHOLDS SOUGHT ASSISTANCE?

What was the outcome of making a homeless application?

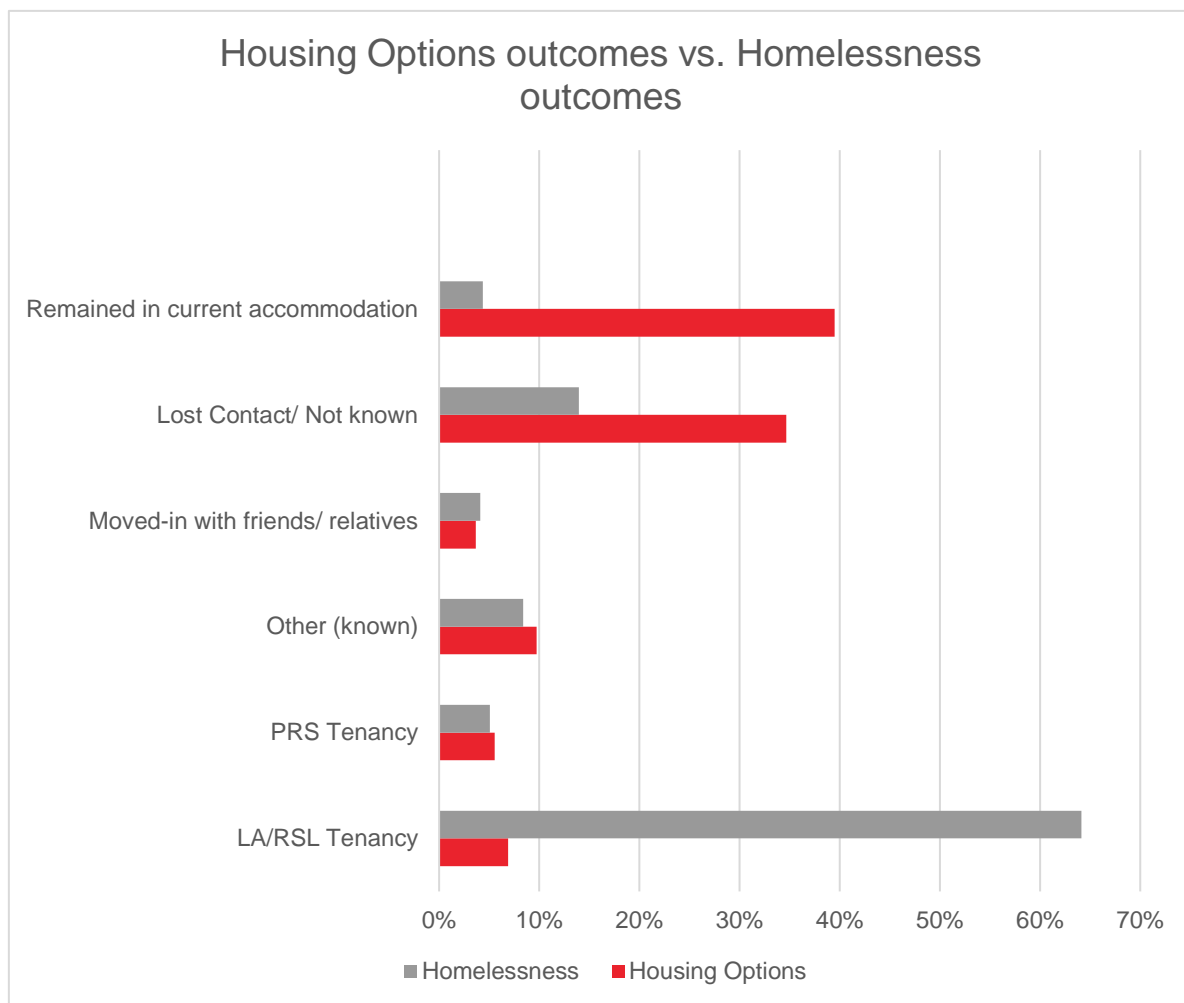
The homelessness data shows there were 28,105 outcomes in 2017-18 for households assessed as homeless.

A household is assessed as either intentionally or unintentionally homeless, based on whether or not they are deemed to have “deliberately done or failed to do anything which led to the loss of accommodation.”¹⁷ If a household is assessed as unintentionally homeless, they have a right to settled accommodation. If a household is assessed as intentionally homeless, the local authority has a duty to provide them with temporary accommodation, advice and assistance to help to secure alternative accommodation.

The following outcomes therefore relate only to those found unintentionally homeless, and to whom the local authority has a duty to provide settled accommodation:

- The proportion of outcomes which show the household secured settled accommodation is slowly increasing, and now stands at 69%. Among individual local authorities, Orkney has the highest percentage with 89%, and Midlothian the lowest with 48% of households securing settled accommodation.
- **The number of households whose outcome was recorded as a hostel after making a homeless application has risen by 15% in the past year.** The majority of this increase is due to rates in Glasgow: of 325 ‘hostel’ outcomes, 300 were in Glasgow. Shelter Scotland would not consider a hostel a positive long-term outcome for a client making a homeless application, and whilst this may be a recording error this is not in line with the local authority’s duty to provide permanent accommodation and merits further investigation.
- There has been a 7% rise in households ‘returning to previous accommodation’. We have no way of knowing whether this is a positive outcome: if the household returns to their previous accommodation as a result of, for example, rent arrears being sorted, or a dispute within the household being resolved, then it might be considered positive. The return would be negative if the problems leading to the homeless application remained unsolved, e.g. domestic abuse or overcrowding.
- When we compare outcomes in the homelessness data to outcomes in the Housing Options data, we see that there are far higher rates of households moving into the social rented sector as a result of making a homeless application, and far higher rates of households who remain in their current accommodation after making a Housing Options approach. This reflects the fact that local authorities owe a full housing duty to households who are assessed as unintentionally homeless, i.e. they are entitled to permanent accommodation.

¹⁷ Scottish Government (2018) [Homelessness in Scotland 2017-18, ‘Summary of current legislation’](#)



Lost contact

- Outcomes showing that contact was lost with the household are more common in Housing Options approaches than in homelessness applications. There are a number of possible explanations for this: it could be a reflection on the respective services (homelessness services have a statutory duty attached to the support they provide, and a duty to record the outcome, whereas there is no such duty under Housing Options), it could imply that households applying as homeless are in more desperate need and therefore less likely to disengage with support services, or it could reflect the length of time cases remain open in each service.
- Outcomes showing contact was lost are increasing among Housing Options approaches (19% of all outcomes in 2017-18, compared to 15% in 2014-15), but decreasing in homelessness applications where they constituted 15% of total outcomes in 2017-18, compared to 17% in 2014-15 (of *all* households assessed as homeless, regardless of intentionality). Contact was also lost with 14% or 3,725 households assessed as not intentionally homeless, and therefore to whom a duty of permanent accommodation was owed, which is particularly concerning.

- Contact was lost with the highest proportion of homeless applicants (regardless of intentionality) in Midlothian (27.5%), East Lothian (25.7%), Edinburgh (21.6%) and Glasgow (21.4%).



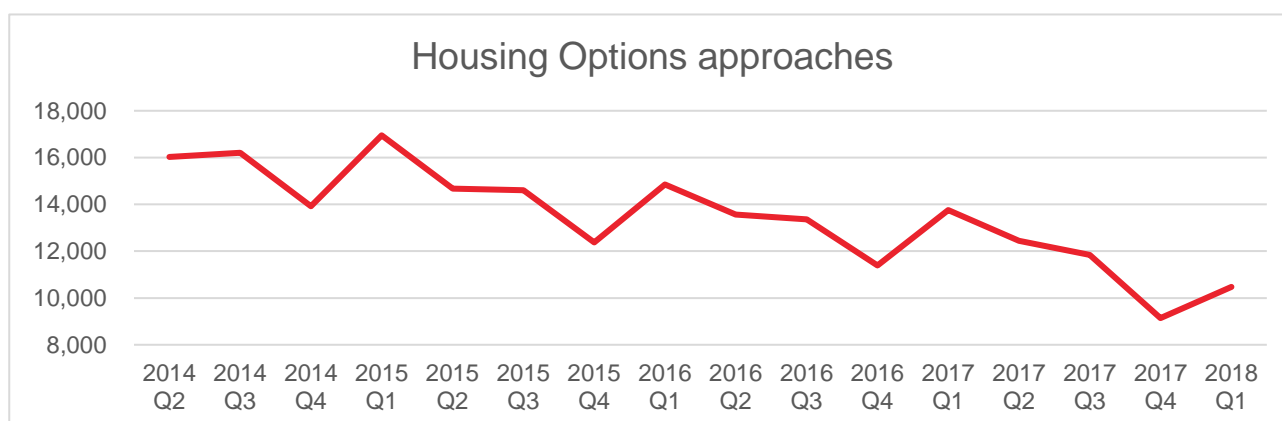
- However, when looking at these outcomes, it can be important to consider both Housing Options and homelessness datasets in tandem. For example, in the Housing Options data Clackmannanshire has the lowest rate of outcomes showing the local authority lost contact with the household: these made up <1% of their total outcomes. However, they have a very high proportion of households who go on to make a homeless application, and the incidence of lost contact in their homelessness data is in line with the national average. Therefore, overall, its likely their lost contact rate is in line with the national average.
- More information on Housing Options can be found in chapter 7.

CHAPTER 7: HOUSING OPTIONS

How many people approached a Housing Options service for assistance?

Housing Options is an advice process delivered by local authorities when a household approaches them with a housing issue. Data on Housing Options began to be recorded in 2014-15, and both recording and delivery practices still vary greatly between local authorities; this means it can be hard to draw firm conclusions about levels of need when comparing statistics between local authorities. In 2014, the Scottish Housing Regulator showed the need for national guidance on the delivery of Housing Options¹⁸, and the Government has since committed to releasing a Housing Options toolkit¹⁹, but this has yet to be released.

- There were 43,900 total Housing Options approaches in 2017-18, made by 26,803 unique households. Many of these households also made a homeless application, and many recorded multiple approaches. Housing Options approaches have been decreasing since records began in 2014.
 - There is a regular pattern of approaches across quarters, with a dip in approaches in Q4 (January – March) every year.

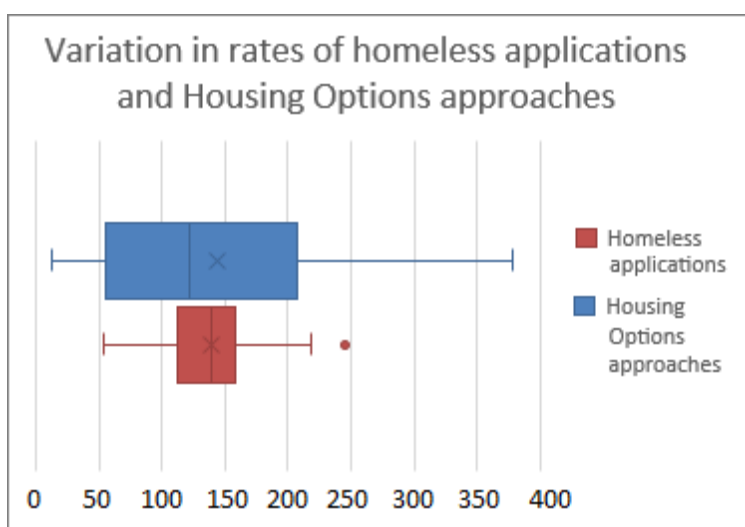


- Dundee and North Lanarkshire have both recorded large decreases (46% and 50% respectively) in the number of Housing Options approaches. It is notable that these local authorities both recorded increases (9% and 12% respectively) in homeless applications.
- Clackmannanshire has recorded the largest increase in the number of Housing Options approaches (10%); one of only 5 local authorities to record an increase in housing option approaches. This was coupled with an 11% increase in homeless applications.
- Perth and Kinross had the highest number of Housing Options approaches over three of the past four years, and this is on the rise. The other three councils with very high levels of Housing Options approaches (Falkirk, Aberdeenshire and North Ayrshire) are all experiencing decreasing trends.

¹⁸ Scottish Housing Regulator (2014), [Housing Options in Scotland: A thematic inquiry](#)

¹⁹ Scottish Government (2018), [Letter](#) from Local Government and Housing Minister, Kevin Stewart, to Bob Doris MSP

- Aberdeen City (378), Argyll & Bute (370), Perth and Kinross (315) and Glasgow (267) have the highest rate of Housing Options approaches per 10,000 households. Eilean Siar (12), East Ayrshire (14) and East Lothian (18) have the lowest rate of approaches per 10,000 households.
- There is *not* a clear relationship between the rate of Housing Options approaches and homeless applications: more Housing Options approaches does not necessarily mean more homeless applications, and vice versa.
 - The rate of Housing Options approaches also varies far more between local authorities compared to the rate of homeless applications: The lowest and highest rates of homelessness applications are 54 (Inverclyde) and 245 (West Dunbartonshire) per 10,000 households respectively, while the lowest and highest rates of Housing Options approaches are 12 (Eilean Siar) and 378 (Aberdeen City) per 10,000 households respectively. This illustrates the need for a more consistent approach to Housing Options across local authorities.



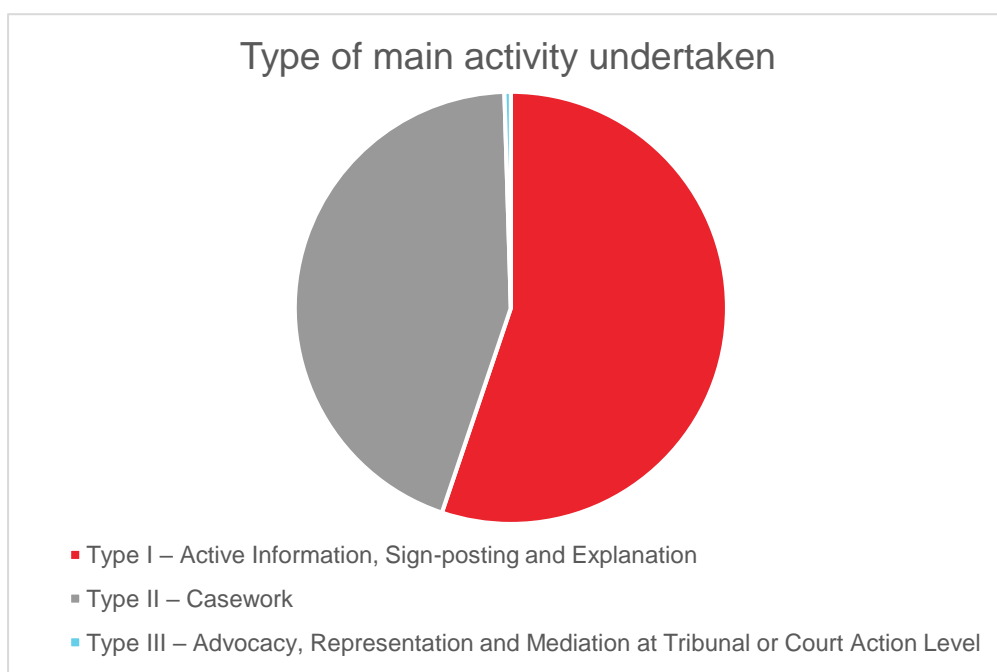
- **The inconsistency in recording methods among local authorities means we cannot be certain whether there's correlation between rates of Housing Options approaches and rates of homeless applications.** For example, some local authorities create both a PREVENT1 record, registering a Housing Options approach, and an HL1 record, showing a homelessness application has been made, when a household approaches them for help, while others only ever record one or the other.

What activities were undertaken by the Housing Options services?

When a household approaches the local authority with a housing issue, the local authority provides assistance under Housing Options known as 'activities'. Examples of Housing Options activities include informing a household of their rights under homelessness legislation, giving advice to help a household save money on fuel costs, or developing a repayment plan so a household can pay off their rent arrears. These activities are categorised, recorded and appear in the Housing Options data. Multiple activities can be undertaken for a single Housing Options approach; activities are then designated as the one 'main' activity, or other 'secondary' activities.

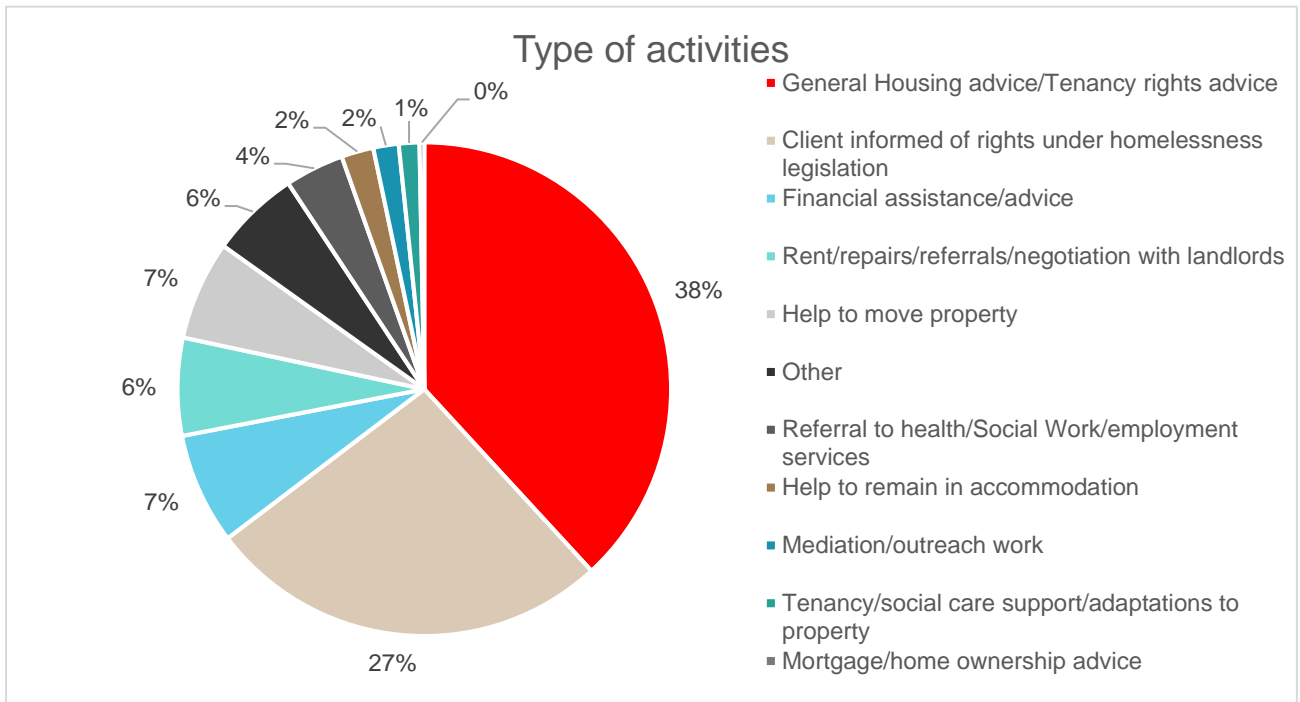
- As a result of the 43,900 Housing Options approaches made in 2017-18, 91,995 activities were carried out. This is 17,555 less than last year.

- The average numbers of activities undertaken per approach is 2.10, a number which has remained stable for the past 3 years after rising from 2.01 in 2014-15. However, there is huge variation across local authorities in this:
 - Falkirk has the highest rate of activities per approach, with each approach resulting in an average of 8.05 activities.
 - East Renfrewshire has the fewest, at 1.00.
 - It's not possible to know from the data whether this variation is due to differences in processes or reporting mechanisms.
- Activities are categorised into 3 types: Type I covers giving information, sign-posting to other services, and explaining processes or legislation; Type II covers more involved activities, such as advocacy and involvement at court or tribunal level; Type III covers long term casework.



- Type I activities are most common, accounting for 55% of all activities undertaken. 45% of all activities are type II, and 1% are of type III²⁰. The distribution of activities between these categories has remained similar for the past four years, with 1% or less of Type III. Nor does there appear to be different levels of activity types by quarter, implying the type of assistance needed and/or given doesn't vary depending on the time of year.
- The data breaks the activities down into smaller categories. In 2017-18, 38% of all activities involved giving the household general housing advice. The next most common activity was informing the client of their rights under homelessness legislation, which accounted for 27% of all activities.

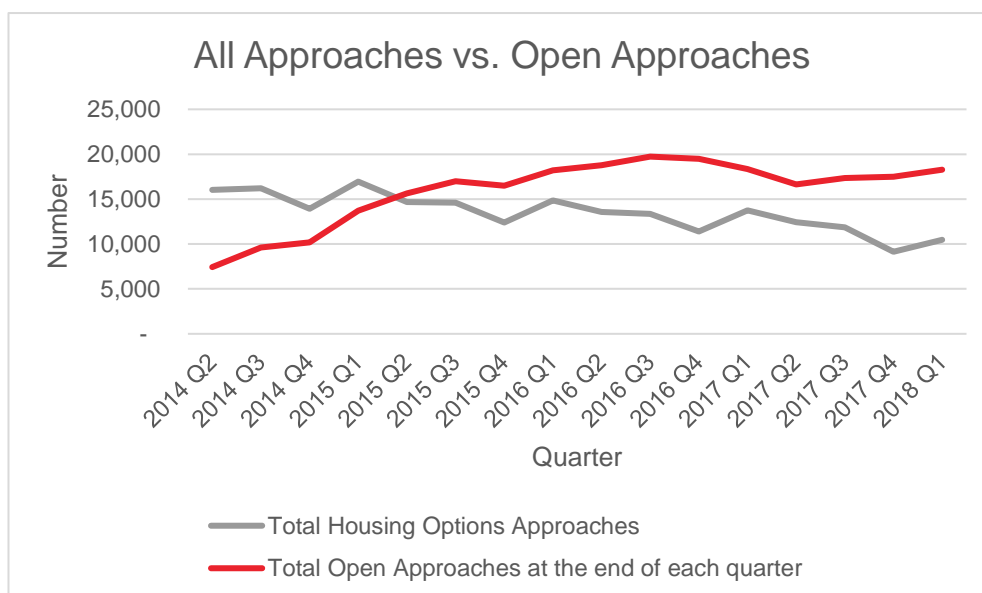
²⁰ Figures may not equal 100% due to rounding.



- There is huge variation between local authorities in the levels of activity type provided. For example, in Stirling, the main activity recorded was general housing and tenancy advice, which made up 72% of all activities delivered. In Eilean Siar however, general housing advice only accounted for 16% of all activities delivered. In Clackmannanshire, 51% of all activities were informing the client of their rights under the homelessness legislation, whereas this only accounted for 11% of all activities recorded in North Lanarkshire.

Open approaches in the Housing Options system

- The numbers of approaches which are still open, i.e. which have not yet reached the outcome stage by the end of the reporting year, is on this rise, even though the number of total approaches has fallen. This implies that approaches are taking increasing amounts of



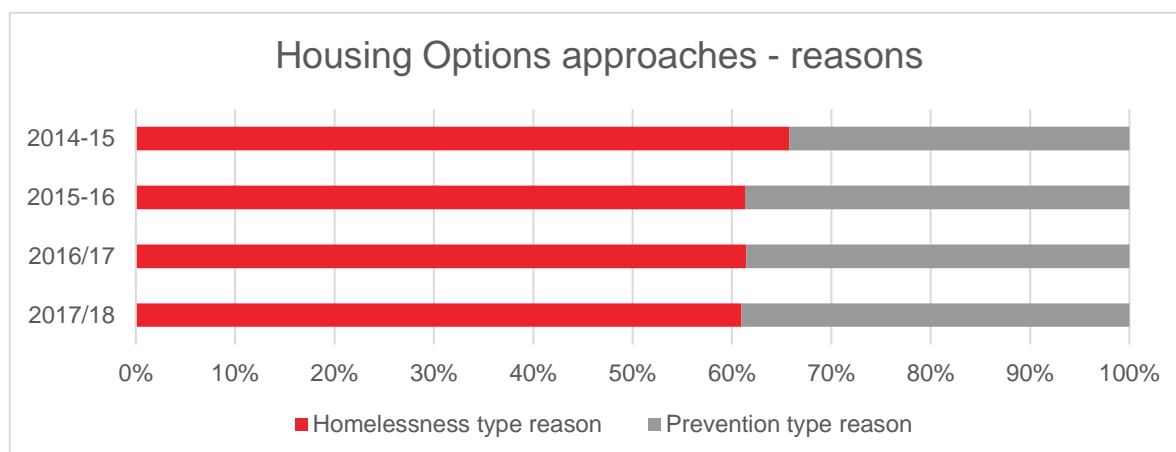
time to be resolved, although some of this may be attributed to the long periods of time before some Housing Options teams follow up cases where there has been no contact.

- As of 31 March 2018, 8% of all approaches received across Scotland between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2018 remained open at the end of the reporting year. This varies greatly between local authorities, with Dundee and Scottish Borders at 1%, and Midlothian at 30%.
- Of all the approaches open at 31st March 2018, 20% were from Edinburgh.

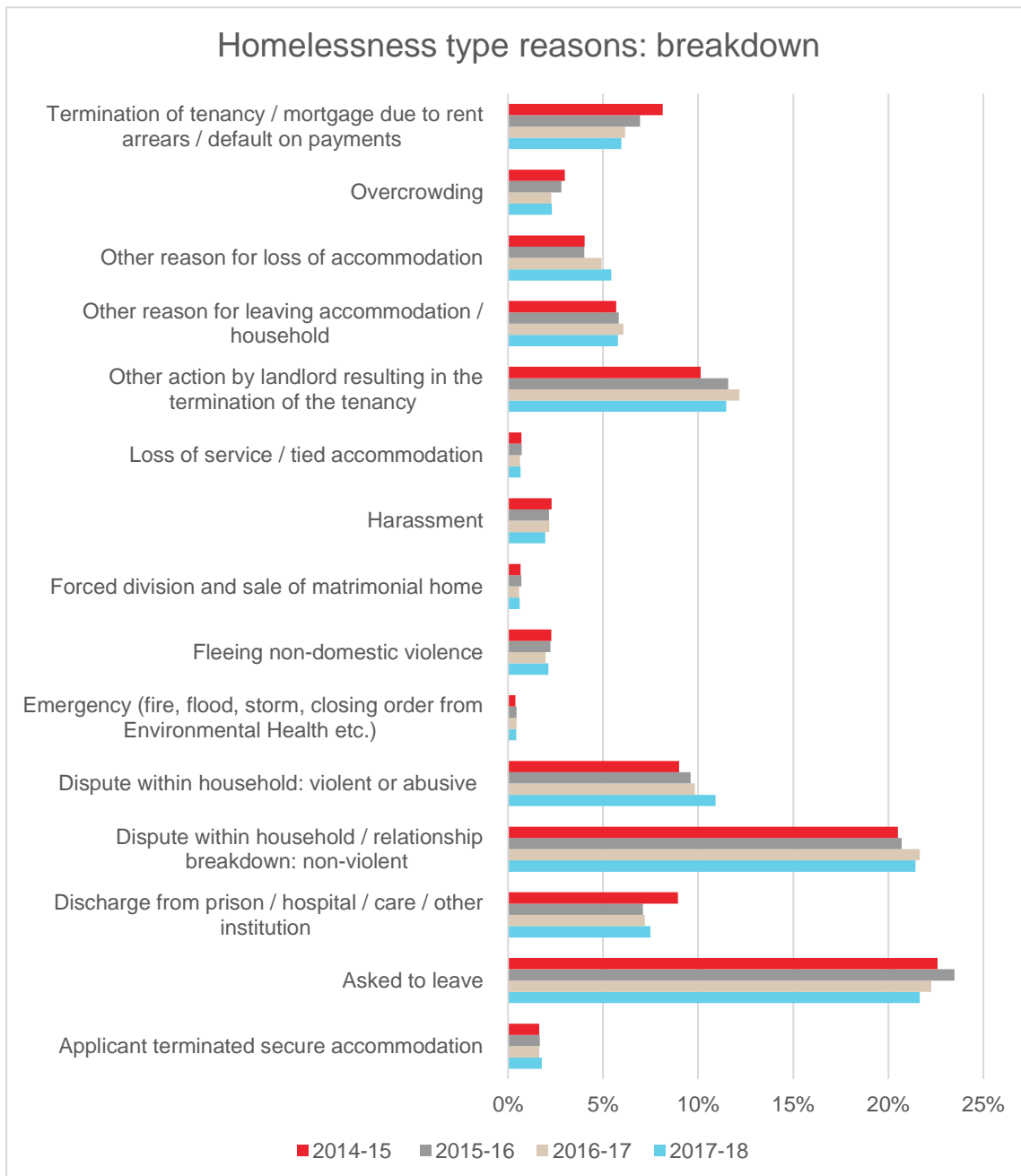
Why did people seek assistance via Housing Options?

When a household approaches the local authority and is assisted through the Housing Options process, their main reason for seeking assistance is classed as either a 'homelessness type reason' (meaning they are at risk of losing their home) or a 'prevention type reason' (a reason that, if resolved, could be seen as preventing homelessness in the future).

- 'Prevention type reasons' increased sharply between 2014-15 and 2015-16, as a percentage of all reasons and now remain stable at 61% of all approaches. There have been considerable changes in the recording of Housing Options data as local authorities have worked together to develop common systems therefore it is difficult to draw conclusions on whether this represents an actual change on the ground.

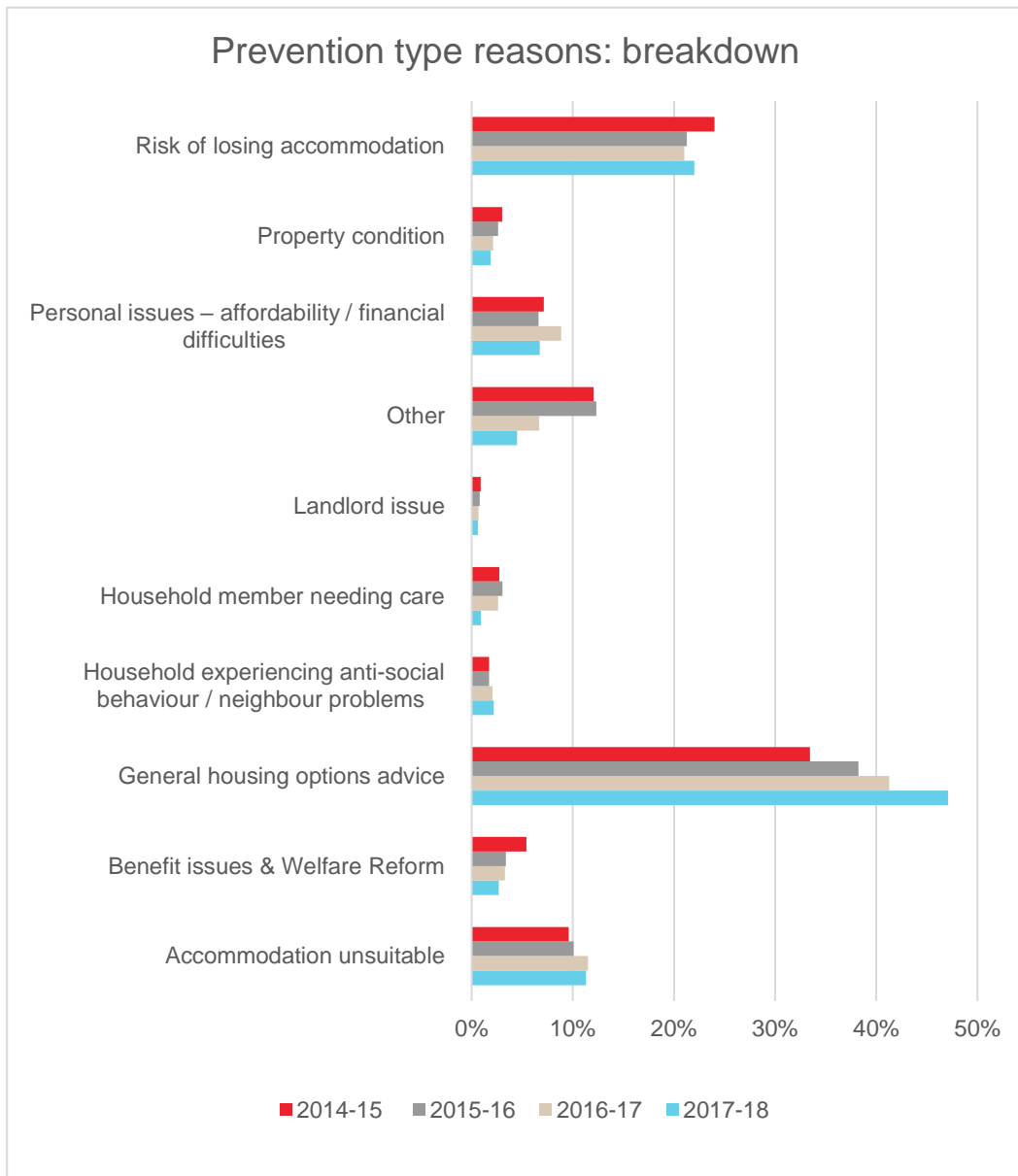


- Of the 'homelessness type reasons' we can see that households are most likely to approach their local authority for help after being asked to leave or following a dispute within the household. Disputes, both violent and nonviolent, are becoming more common motivators for making a Housing Options approach.



- Reasons for approach within those reasons classed as 'prevention type reasons', have changed over the past four years. As detailed in the graph below, the proportion of applicants making Housing Options approaches for 'general Housing Options advice' has increased greatly over the past 4 years.

- The majority of other reasons have become less prevalent, including some for which we may have expected to see increase, such as issues relating to benefits and welfare reform. Other financial reasons also appear to be on the decrease: the number of households seeking assistance as a result of affordability/financial difficulties has decreased over the past four years. There is a similar picture within those reasons classed as 'homelessness-type', where there has been a decrease in the number of households citing rent arrears or a default on payments as their reason for seeking assistance.

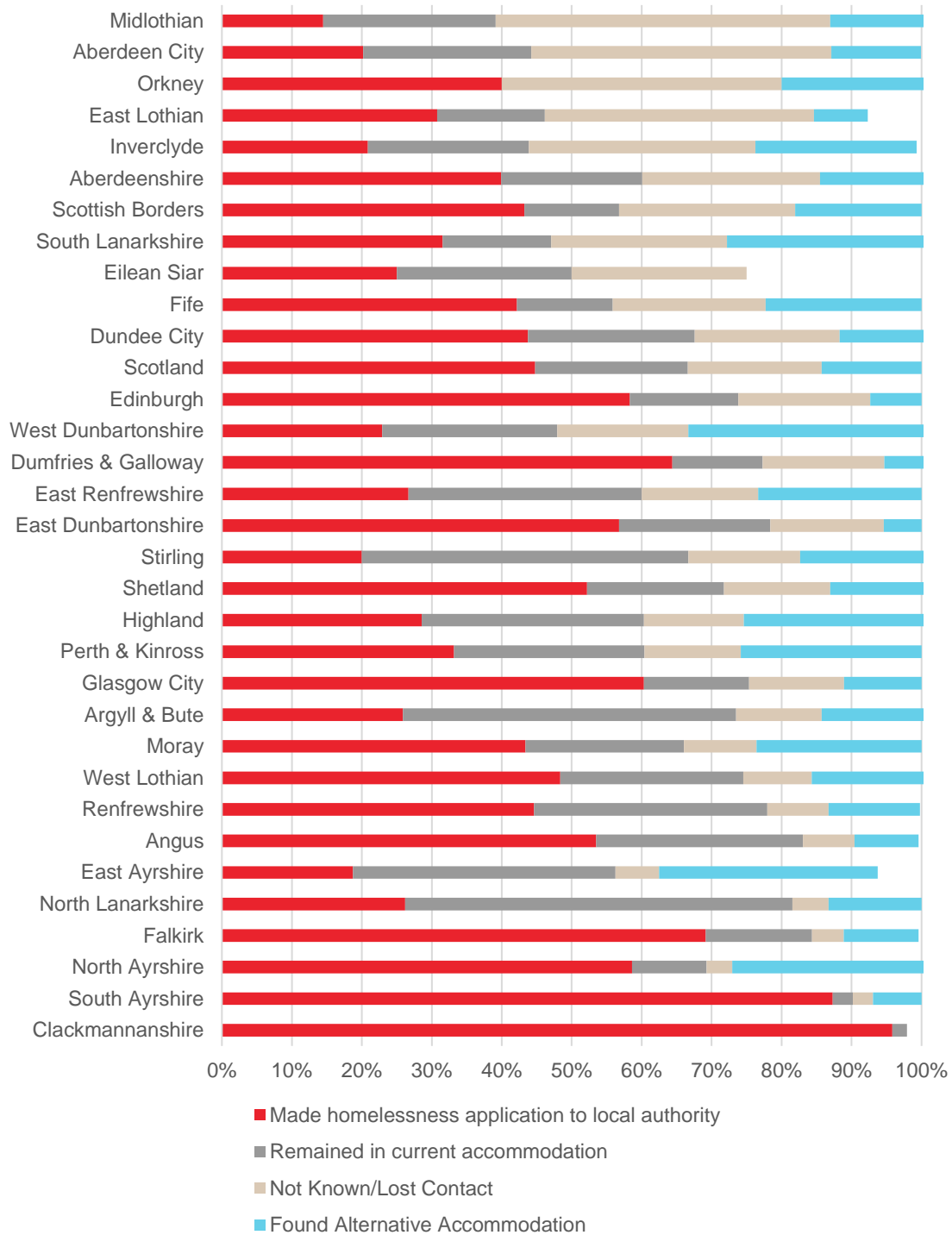


What was the outcome of using Housing Options?

There were 43,695 Housing Options outcomes and 43,900 Housing Options approaches in 2017-18. Whilst not all approaches from 2017-18 will receive outcomes within the year, and some outcomes received in 2017-18 will correspond to approaches from a previous year, we can assume there is roughly one outcome per approach.

- The most common outcome was that a household made a homeless application. There were 19,690 outcomes of this type in 2017-18, or 45% of all recorded Housing Options outcomes. This has decreased by 2% since 2016-17.
- The most common settled accommodation outcome was that the household remained in their current accommodation. There were 9,585 outcomes of this type, or 22% of all outcomes.
- The third most common outcome for households accessing Housing Options advice was that contact was lost, representing 8,415 outcomes, or 19% of all outcomes. This figure is increasing: in 2014-15, 15% of outcomes showed lost contact. This is concerning, as it is impossible to know whether contact was lost following the household resolving their housing issue of their own accord, or whether the housing issue continues and/or worsens. Housing Options is intended to be a preventative housing pathway, but cannot function as such if local authorities lose contact with those trying to access support.
- The data collected and reported on outcomes is limited. Making a homeless application doesn't signify the end of a household's housing issues, and it is not clear whether a household remaining in their current accommodation is a positive outcome for the client.
- There is considerable variation among local authorities, much of which can be attributed to differing practices and/or recording methods. However, a few outliers merit further investigation:
 - In Clackmannanshire, 96% of all outcomes were 'made a homelessness application', compared to just 14% in Midlothian. This variation is a good example of how differently services are run in different parts of the country. It is likely that the service in Midlothian records all approaches, including those with a very low level of need, whereas the Housing Options service in Clackmannanshire only records approaches for households in crisis. That does not necessarily mean that all households approaching Clackmannanshire council aren't given assistance; merely that they're not recorded. This shows the limits of the data without accompanying knowledge of how services are run.

Housing Options outcomes



How many households made more than one Housing Options approach?

- 3,545 households made more than one Housing Options approach in 2017-18. Of them, 3,130 made two approaches, and 415 made three or more approaches. This amounts to 9% of all Housing Options approaches.
 - The local authorities in which repeat approaches accounted for the highest proportion of approaches were Perth and Kinross (14%), Renfrewshire (14%) Glasgow (13%) and Falkirk (13%). There does not seem to be a strong correlation between high proportions of repeat Housing Options approaches and repeat homeless assessments²¹.

²¹ Using Pearson's correlation coefficient, $\rho = 0.35$, implying a medium strength association between the two variables.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Statistics can never tell us the full story of homelessness in Scotland, and it is crucial that we don't forget that behind each of these statistics is a person and a family having to deal with the personal crisis of homelessness. Individual stories and voices are central to shaping action to tackle homelessness. However, the statistics published by the Scottish Government and analyses within this report point to many areas where there is still much more to do: they tell us which groups are over-represented, which pockets of the country have specific issues, and many of the reasons that people come to apply as homeless, as well as the responses and outcomes they get from their local authority who are there to support them and fulfil their statutory duty to assist.

Many of the issues raised in this report have been raised via the recent Homeless and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG), and recommendations from that work are now being taken forward by the Homeless Prevention and Strategy Group. At the outset of that process, Shelter Scotland produced recommendations for HARSAG which remain pertinent²². Shelter Scotland looks forward to seeing these recommendations put into action. This section summarises some key concerns.

Standards in temporary accommodation

As of 31st March 2018, there were 10,933 households in temporary accommodation: an increase for the fourth year running. The newly available temporary accommodation data shows that households are spending significant amounts of time in temporary accommodation, on average just under six months but 13% of households spent more than a year in temporary accommodation. Households with children can expect to spend, on average, a month and a half longer in temporary accommodation than households without children. Temporary accommodation is an important part of our housing safety net, and a move away from the crisis of homelessness, but the adverse effect it can have on a person's life are well documented, particularly when that temporary accommodation is of poor quality. **It is crucial that time spent in temporary accommodation is kept to a minimum, and new enforceable standards are introduced to ensure that temporary accommodation, where its use is necessary, provides a positive stepping stone into permanent accommodation.**

In 2017, legislation was amended to reduce the amount of time families and pregnant people can spend in B&Bs and other types of accommodation deemed to be unsuitable. We have seen a rise in breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order in light of this change. **It is vital that local authorities are held to account and supported to reduce the practice of housing people in unsuitable accommodation, particularly in these instances where it is illegal.**

Lost contacts

Contact was lost with a household seeking assistance in one in every five Housing Options approaches. Contact was lost with a household assessed as homeless in more than one in seven cases. Early intervention is key when addressing housing issues in order to prevent those issues from worsening. **Shelter Scotland recommends local authorities take action to reduce the proportion of outcomes in both Housing Options and homelessness services in which contact is lost with a household.**

²² Shelter Scotland (2017). [Scottish Government's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group – Shelter Scotland's recommendations for action](#)

Youth homelessness

25.4% of all homeless applications made in 2017-18 were made by people under 25. If the idea of facing homelessness at the start of one's adult life is not bleak enough, we know that once someone has experienced homelessness once, they are more likely to experience it again. It is therefore imperative that this number is brought down: **Shelter Scotland would like to see targeted assistance for young people facing homelessness.**

Gender

Homelessness is more prevalent in young women than young men, and we also know women are over-represented within the number of single parent families making an application. Single mothers are more likely to be affected by the benefit cap, which leads to households having difficulty affording housing costs and facing eviction²³. More households are seeking assistance through both homelessness and Housing Options pathways due to violent or abusive household disputes; another issue which is more likely to affect women. **More consideration is needed to tackle the gendered nature of homelessness.**

Overrepresentation of certain groups

Many groups are over-represented in the homeless statistics, including people who were formerly looked after by the local authority, people who have previously been in prison, and those who have previously served in the armed forces. Some work has already been done to ensure targeted support for these groups, including standards on housing advice and support for prisoners introduced in 2017.²⁴ **Shelter Scotland recommends increased prevention activities in these sectors, and cross-portfolio consideration of how existing systems make individuals from these areas more likely to experience homelessness.**

Repeat homelessness

6.4% of all assessments in 2017-18 related to a household who had already been assessed as homeless previously within the same year. This proportion has increased over the past 7 years. We know the homeless experience is incredibly disruptive for the household involved, and incredibly expensive for local authorities. **This makes a clear case for support from local authorities to be sustained for a longer period post-assessment.**

Housing Options guidance

Shelter Scotland supports the provision of Housing Options and appreciates the distinct role it plays in delivering an appropriate response to some levels of housing need. However, differing Housing Options services across the country and a lack of guidance mean that it is difficult to know whether households seeking assistance are receiving an equal standard of support. This difference in delivery and recording practices can also hinder analysis of the Housing Options datasets. To address some of these concerns, **the long-awaited Housing Options toolkit should be implemented as soon as possible.**

²³ Shelter Scotland (2018), [Shelter Scotland response to the Work and Pensions Committee inquiry on the benefit cap](#)

²⁴ Scottish Prison Service and partners (2017) [Scottish Quality Standards: Housing advice, information and support for people in and leaving prison](#)

Private rental sector

Private tenants are currently over-represented in the homeless statistics, making up 18% of all homeless applicants. The Private Housing (Tenancies) Scotland Act 2016 has recently come into force. It replaced assured and short assured tenancy agreements for all new tenancies with the private residential tenancy and changed the rights of tenants and their ability to ensure they can take action to raise standards. The improvements should have some effect on the level of housing need. **Shelter Scotland would therefore like to see increased efforts to raise awareness of tenants' rights under the new legislation, as well as enforcement of the new legislation and continued scrutiny of its effects.**

Additional support needs

Households who identify at least one support need now make up 47% of all those assessed as homeless, and an increasing proportion of these identified a mental health condition. This reflects the anecdotal experience of Shelter Scotland advisors, who are not only encountering increasing people with mental health issues, but increasingly complex mental health issues, and we know that individuals with poor mental health can find it difficult to access services. **Consideration is needed of how mental health issues can affect an individual's ability to engage with services at a delivery level.**

A recent research project linking health and homelessness data²⁵ supplements the annual statistics: people who have experienced homelessness are more likely to have a health condition relating to either drugs, alcohol or mental health (though over half do not have any such health condition), and people who have experienced homelessness are more likely to have experienced multiple health conditions relating to drugs, alcohol and mental health. It also shows that as a group, people who have experienced homelessness have many more interactions with health services than those who have no experience of homelessness and interactions with some services, particularly those related to alcohol, drugs and mental health, increase in the lead up to a homeless application. The evidence indicates **the value of partnership working between health and homeless services**, including the importance of signposting and the colocation of services, to ensure that where homelessness can be prevented, it is, and where it cannot, that people receive the right support at the right time.

Poverty, social security and housing supply: the underlying causes of homelessness

The increase in homeless applications for the first time in 9 years shows that the impact of Housing Options has tailed off. To continue to reduce the level of homelessness in Scotland, it is necessary to address the drivers of homelessness, in particular, poverty and the lack of affordable homes.

Social security should at the very least provide an adequate financial safety net to prevent people from becoming homeless and to keep them in homes which meet their needs. However, we know that the safety net is breaking due to a number of welfare reform measures which have been imposed in recent years. The rollout of Universal Credit has caused hardship for many of our clients, and through our services, we know that the benefit cap in particular is beginning to hit households and especially larger families hard and as a result they are struggling to afford their rent and avoid homelessness.²⁶ In addition, the freeze on Local Housing Allowance which supports private tenants on low incomes to pay their rent has been frozen for the third year in a row, while private renting is becoming increasingly expensive. **Shelter Scotland therefore recommends the**

²⁵ Scottish Government (2018) [Health and Homelessness in Scotland](#), and for a summary and further analysis Shelter Scotland (2018) [Topic briefing: Health and Homelessness 2018](#)

²⁶ Shelter Scotland (2018), [Shelter Scotland response to the Work and Pensions Committee inquiry on the benefit cap](#)

removal of the benefit cap, that the rollout of Universal Credit is paused, and an end to the freeze on Local Housing Allowance, to prevent more households become homeless.

It is undeniable that a significant increase in the supply of affordable homes is necessary to tackling the housing crisis in Scotland. Shelter Scotland welcomed the Scottish Government's 2016 commitment to build 50,000 affordable homes by 2021, including at least 35,000 for social rent. Housebuilding statistics for Scotland show that they are on track to deliver on this²⁷. However, **Shelter Scotland would like to see an increased focus on the nuances of delivery to ensure that the right homes are being built where they are needed, as well as affordable house building commitments that extend beyond 2021.**

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²⁷ Scottish Government (2018) [Housing Statistics for Scotland](#)

Shelter Scotland helps over half a million people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness through our advice, support and legal services. And we campaign to make sure that, one day, no one will have to turn to us for help.

We're here so no one has to fight bad housing or homelessness on their own.

Please support us at shelterscotland.org