

The use of temporary accommodation in Scotland

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Key Points

- 60% of all homeless households spend time in temporary accommodation while the local authority resolves their homeless application.
- On average, households using temporary accommodation stayed there for 18 weeks. However 1 in 4 households spend over 6 months there, and 1 in 10 spend over a year in temporary accommodation.
- Households with children spend more time in temporary accommodation on average than households without children.
- The pattern of offers of temporary accommodation made to households with and without children is very different. 43% of offers made to households without children are for bed and breakfast accommodation.

Recommendations

- The available data on use of temporary accommodation across Scotland is limited. Shelter Scotland would support the HL3 statistical return from local authorities being made mandatory to allow for a better understanding of the experiences of homeless households using temporary accommodation.
- Shelter Scotland ask that the Scottish Government officially endorse and support non-statutory guidance on standards in temporary accommodation to ensure that stays in temporary accommodation are a positive stepping stone.
- Renewed attention must be given to the provision of more affordable housing in Scotland.

Introduction

Scotland has some of the most progressive homelessness legislation in the world, featuring the provision of temporary accommodation (TA) for homeless applicants at different stages of their homeless application.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 amended the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 requiring local authorities to provide TA to all homeless applicants whilst their applications are being assessed. Those who were assessed as being in priority need (part of a defined list of variables including, for example, vulnerability due to old age) were entitled to TA until permanent accommodation was found, or for those not in priority need, TA was to be provided for a reasonable period whilst the applicant was given information and assistance to secure alternative accommodation themselves.

The Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 went a step further and removed the priority need distinction, meaning that all unintentionally homeless households were given the right to a permanent home. This became known as the '2012 commitment' and from the end of 2012 local authorities have had to fulfil this duty.

The 2003 Act also included powers that were used to introduce the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004, which required local authorities to ensure that homeless households with children, and pregnant women, were not placed in unsuitable TA (which includes bed and breakfast accommodation) unless under exceptional circumstances. In 2011, Shelter Scotland and the Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland jointly issued guidance on physical standards of TA as well as good practice in terms of location, service and management.¹ Shelter Scotland have continued to campaign for the Scottish Government to build on and officially support and endorse guidance based on this.² We welcomed the amendment made in 2014 to the 2004 Order,³ expanding the definition of 'unsuitable accommodation' to include that it must be wind and watertight.

¹ Shelter Scotland and CIH Scotland, Temporary accommodation guidance, January 2011

http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/temporary_accommodation_guidance

² Shelter Scotland, Temporary accommodation standards: campaign briefing, November 2013

http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/temporary_accommodation_standards_campaign_briefing

³ The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2014

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2014/243/made>

Accessing quality TA is the crucial first step away from homelessness. Shelter Scotland is concerned about whether TA is delivering its full potential as a positive move away from crisis, and whether the best use is being made of this expensive resource: Audit Scotland estimated local authorities spend about £27 million more by housing people in temporary accommodation, rather than in a permanent home.⁴ This is especially paramount at a time when there is great pressure on local authority finances.

We know that there are long delays between the date of application and the date of outcome of homeless applications and that the majority of households spend time in TA as part of their homeless application. Being in TA can be disruptive especially for the 4,586 children who live there⁵ and long periods in TA can impact on a child's physical and mental health and their educational attainment.⁶ Households in TA can feel disconnected from the wider community, unable to settle in and make the accommodation a home.

It is important, therefore, to understand the nature and impact of the experiences of homeless households who spend time in TA. The statistics currently available on TA are very restricted. In response to the limitations of existing datasets on TA, in August 2014 Shelter Scotland made a freedom of information (FOI) request to all 32 local authorities to address the gaps in identifying length of stay in TA, and the different experiences of households with and without children. We received data from 23 local authorities, with varying levels of completeness. Though not all local authorities were able to provide data, the information submitted covered 73% (or 26,940 cases) of all cases closed in Scotland in 2013-14.

This report draws on this freedom of information request, existing statistics and new performance information from the Scottish Housing Regulator [see appendix]. Taken together these provide a better understanding of the experiences of homeless households using TA. However, information on impact remains very limited. Unless otherwise specified, all statistics used are from the data submitted in response to our FOI request.

⁴ Audit Scotland (2013) *Housing in Scotland* http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2013/nr_130711_housing_overview.pdf

⁵ Scottish Government, Quarterly Temporary Accommodation Reference Tables July to September 2014 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/RefTables/HomelessJultoSep2014>

⁶ Shelter Scotland, Temporary accommodation standards: campaign briefing, November 2013 http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/temporary_accommodation_standards_campaign_briefing

How much is temporary accommodation used?

- During 2013-14 there was an average of 10,275 households in Scotland in TA on any one night, of whom 2,662 (26%) were households with children.⁷
- In total, in 2013-14 local authorities provided an estimated 3.8 million days of TA for homeless households of which just under 1 million were for households with children.⁸
- 60%⁹ of all households whose cases closed in 2013-14 occupied TA arranged by the local authority at some point during their homelessness assessment.
- 54%¹⁰ of all households with children whose cases closed in 2013-14 occupied TA arranged by the local authority at some point during their homelessness assessment.
- 58%¹¹ of all households without children whose cases closed in 2013-14 occupied TA arranged by the local authority at some point during their homelessness assessment.

How long do people spend in temporary accommodation?

Shelter Scotland estimates from the existing published data that **the average (mean) time spent in TA for all households who spent time there was 126 days (18 weeks).**¹² Evidence from our FOI request helps break this down further.¹³

⁷ Source: Scottish Government quarterly accommodation reference tables

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/RefTables>

⁸ Source: Estimated from Scottish Government quarterly accommodation reference tables

⁹ Based on responses from 20 local authorities.

¹⁰ Based on responses from 17 local authorities.

¹¹ Based on responses from 16 local authorities. The 60% 'all households' figure is from a larger number of responses to the FOI request. Fewer local authorities provided information separately for households with and without children. Therefore the 54% and 58% figures are calculated on a slightly different basis.

¹² The estimate draws together information from local authorities' ARC returns to the Housing Regulator and evidence from analyses of the Scottish Government's HL1 database on the number of different types of temporary accommodation occupied by households whose case was closed in 2013-14.

¹³ NB: These statistics only correspond to households whose cases were closed in 2013-14, therefore it does not cover applicants who have been in temporary accommodation for a long period and whose case is still open.

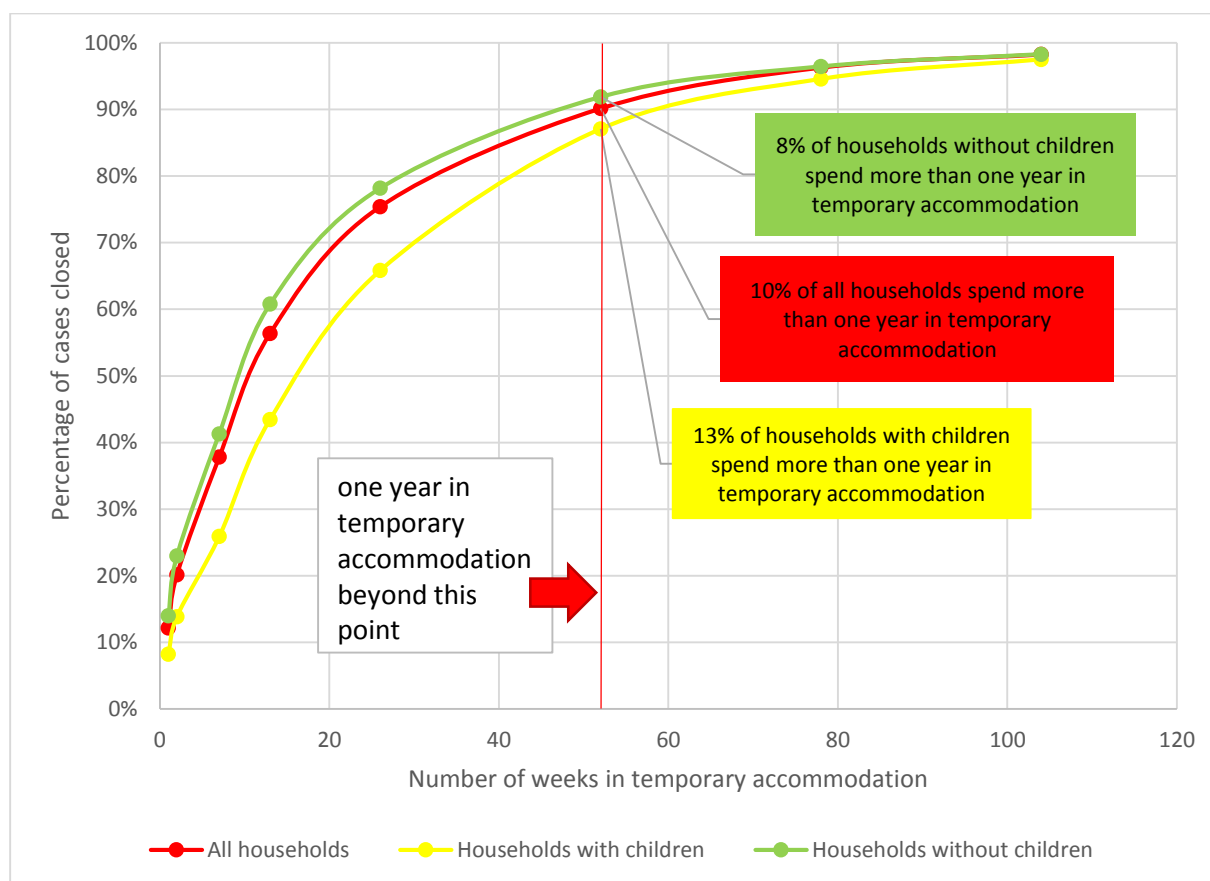


Chart 1: Percentage of cases closed by time spent in temporary accommodation

- 20% (1 in 5) of households spent less than 2 weeks in TA.
- 40% (2 in 5) spent less than 6 weeks in TA.
- 50% of households spent more than 11 weeks in TA.
- 24% spent more than 6 months in TA.
- 1 in 10 households spent over a year in TA.
- Households with children spend more time in TA than households without children.
 - 14% of households with children spent less than 2 weeks in TA (compared to 23% of households without children).
 - 74% of households with children spent over 6 weeks in TA (compared to 59% of households without children).
 - 50% of households with children spent over 18 weeks in TA, whereas 50% of households without children spent over 9 weeks in TA.
 - 44% spent more than 6 months in TA (compared to 22% of households without children).
 - 13% of households with children spent over a year in TA (compared to 8% of households without children).
 - Given the lack of available data, we cannot be sure of the destination of households once leaving TA – the shorter time in TA of households without

children therefore does not necessarily mean they are being placed in permanent accommodation quicker but may relate to these households leaving TA before they receive an offer of settled accommodation or achieving another positive outcome.

What type of temporary accommodation do households stay in?

- Over 9,500 households whose cases closed in 2013-14 spent time in local authority accommodation and nearly 8,000 spent time in bed and breakfast accommodation. [Chart 2]
- While a high number of households spent time in bed and breakfast accommodation the average time they spent in this type of accommodation (41 days) was markedly lower than the average time spent by households in local authority dwellings, registered social landlord dwellings or private leases (per placement).
- It seems likely that the fact that there is a relatively high number of households housed in bed and breakfast TA together with the relatively low time spent in this type of accommodation is due in part to a pattern of initial placement in bed and breakfast followed, for longer duration cases, by households moving on to TA with a local authority, registered social landlord or private sector leased dwelling.

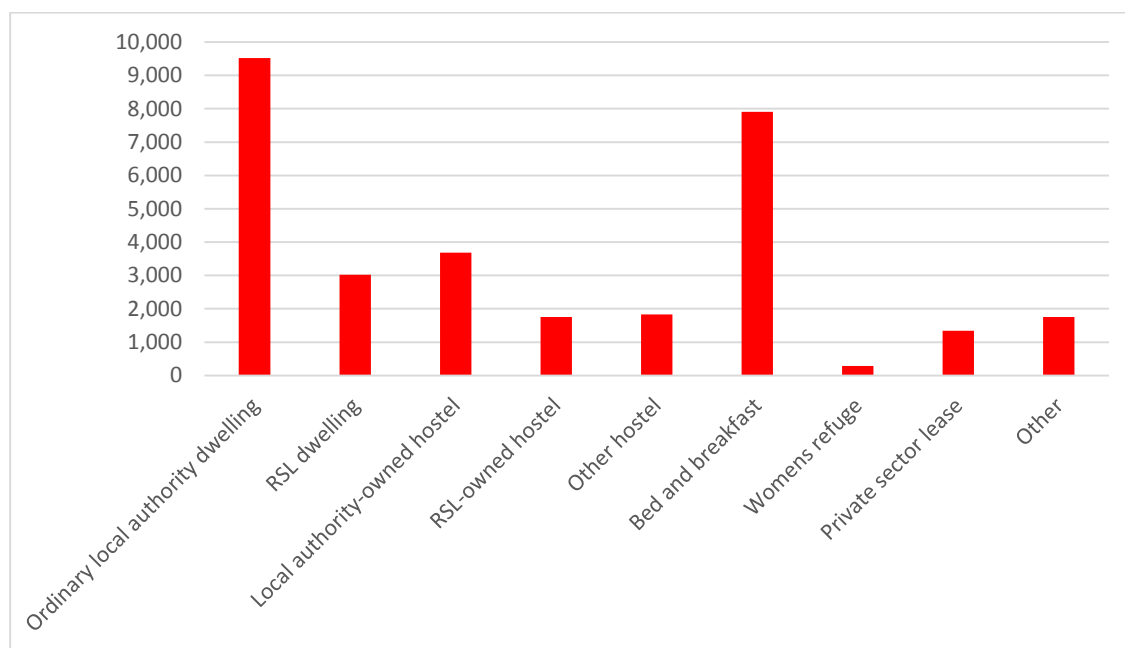


Chart 2: Number of households spending time in each type of temporary accommodation whose case closed 2013-14

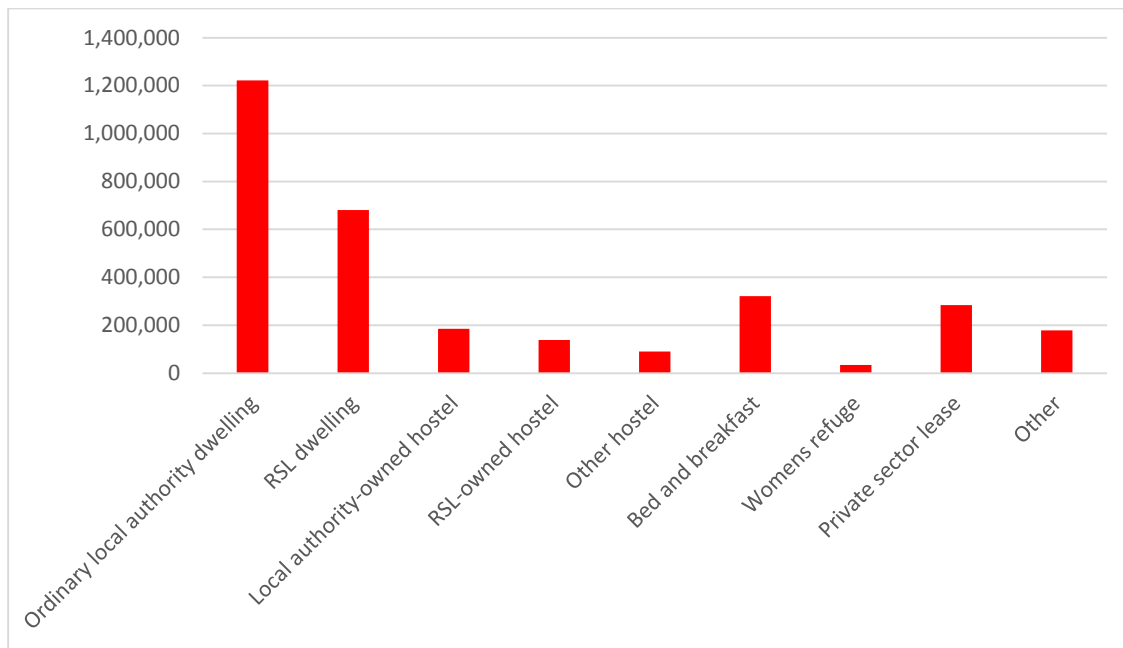


Chart 3: Total number of days spent in each type of accommodation

What types of temporary accommodation were offered?

- In 2013-14 Scottish local authorities made 38,682 offers of TA to homeless households.
- 31% of offers made were for ordinary local authority dwellings, and 29% for bed and breakfast accommodation.
- The pattern of offers made to households with and without children is very different. Households without children – who are mostly single people – were much more likely to be offered bed and breakfast accommodation (41% offers) than households with children (5% offers). [Chart 4] As noted above, it is likely that some of these offers are for initial placements, and households will then move on to other types of TA. However currently there is no data available to explain this.

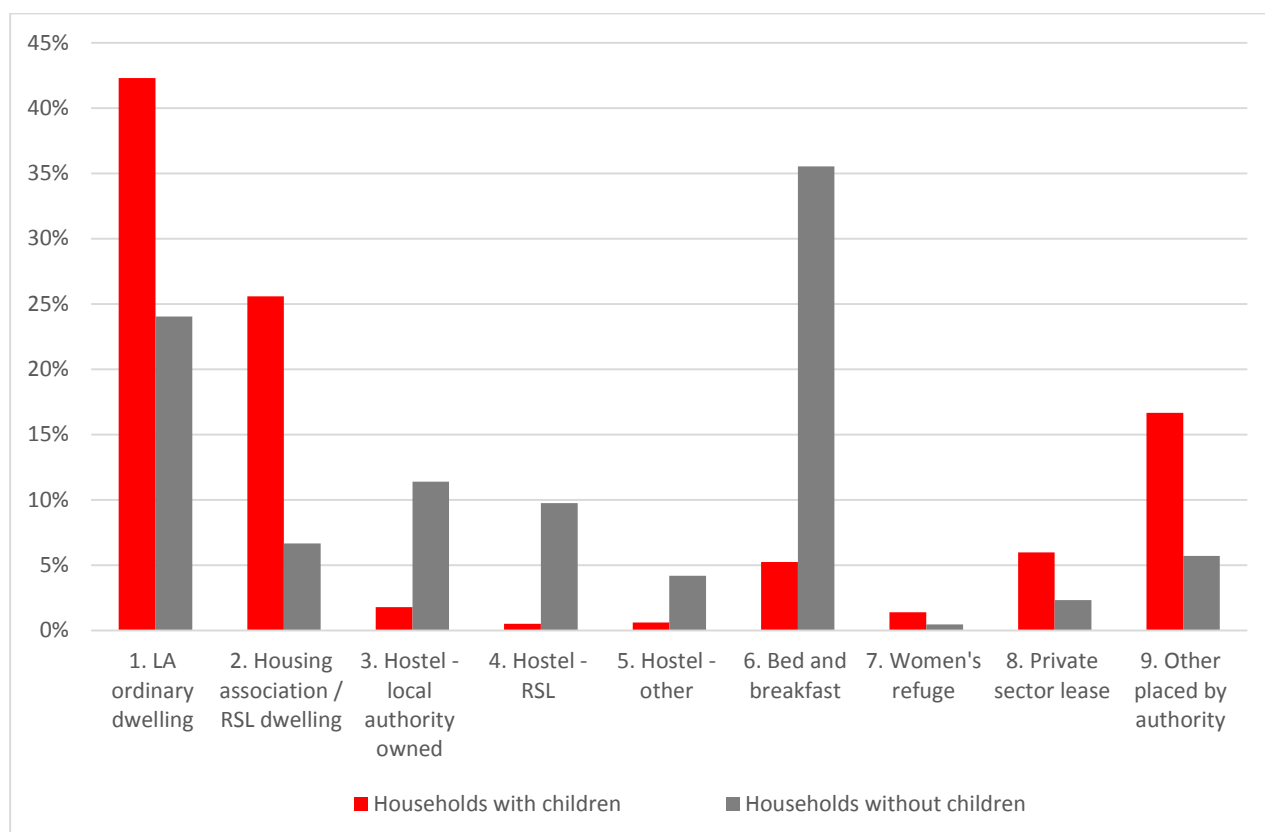


Chart 4: Offers of temporary accommodation by accommodation type and household type

What types of temporary accommodation were refused and what were the satisfaction levels with temporary accommodation occupied?

- Of the 38,682 offers made in 2013-14, 2,805 were refused (7% of all offers made).¹⁴
- 7% of homeless households with children refused an offer compared with 4% of households without children.¹⁵
- The proportions of offers refused varied between 2% for the relatively small numbers of offers of TA in women's refuges, up to 12% for offers of TA in 'other hostels' and 'other' accommodation types.¹⁶ In 2013-14 there were over 5,500 offers of these types of TA. Local authorities should consider what it is about these 'other' accommodation types which makes them less acceptable to over 1 in 10 of the households to which they were offered.

¹⁴ Source: Local authority ARC indicator on offers of temporary accommodation for 2013-14 reported to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

¹⁵ Source: 14 local authorities responding to Shelter Scotland's FOI request.

¹⁶ Source: ARC indicator returns to the Scottish housing regulator.

- Notably, across Scotland as a whole there was very little difference in the refusal rate for bed and breakfast accommodation (6%) than for an 'ordinary local authority dwelling' (7%) and 'registered social landlord dwelling' (5%).¹⁷ This might suggest that in some circumstances bed and breakfast is an acceptable option for homeless households. As noted above, most offers of bed and breakfast accommodation are to single people; and it is likely that bed and breakfast is often used as short-term emergency accommodation until more suitable TA can be arranged.
- 65% of respondents were very satisfied with their TA, and a further 25% were fairly satisfied. 4% were either fairly or very dissatisfied. Information is not available on satisfaction for each type of TA occupied. It is important to note that in 2013-14 local authorities asked the question of only a small proportion of those leaving TA. Local authorities inform us that their coverage for this question is likely to improve in their Annual Return of the Charter (ARC) data submissions for 2014-15.

Conclusion

The data outlined above gives a picture of the use of TA for homeless households. With an average stay of 18 weeks, and 1 in 10 households spending more than a year in TA, it is important that we develop our data to help understand this important area. This data collection task has not given any indication of trends over time, therefore we have no information whether the situation is getting better, or worse, for households in TA. To increase our understanding Shelter Scotland would support the introduction of mandatory submission of the HL3 dataset to the Scottish Government.

The provision of TA is crucial for the 36,457 households who applied as homeless in 2013-14. However, we know the detrimental impact of long stays in TA, particularly for households with children. For the 1 in 10 households that are spending more than 1 year in TA in particular, we need to make sure that minimum standards are met, not just in the quality of the accommodation but also in terms of the support and services that are provided to ensure that this time spent is worthwhile and that when the household moves to permanent housing this is sustainable. Building on the standards we jointly produced in 2010 with the Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland, Shelter Scotland ask for the development of Scottish Government endorsed guidance of minimum standards for all households in TA.

¹⁷ Source: ARC indicator returns to the Scottish housing regulator.

Ultimately however, we need to ensure that a renewed emphasis is on the delivery of affordable housing in Scotland to ensure that long stays in temporary accommodation are reduced.

Contact:

Rosemary Brotchie, Policy and Research Manager

Email: rosemary_brotchie@shelter.org.uk Tel: 0344 515 2471

Appendix: Background to data sources used

The sources

This report is based on statistical information about temporary accommodation from three sources:

1. The quarterly temporary accommodation statistics collected by Scottish Government statisticians from Scottish local authorities.¹⁸ This provides information on:
 - Number of households in temporary accommodation by type of accommodation at the end of each quarter.
 - Number of such households which have children or a household member pregnant; and number of children in such households.
2. Performance information gathered by the Scottish Housing Regulator for the first time in 2014 on local authority performance in providing temporary accommodation to homeless households.¹⁹ These provide information, for homeless households whose case was closed in 2013-14, on:
 - Number who spent time in each type of temporary accommodation during their homelessness application.
 - The total amount of time spent in each type of accommodation.
 - Offers and refusals of offers for each type of temporary accommodation.
 - Whether households were satisfied with the temporary accommodation they had used.
3. Information supplied by the 23 local authorities who responded to Shelter Scotland's freedom of information request for supplementary information not covered in the Scottish Government statistics or the ARC indicator data. This provided information for homeless households whose case was closed in 2013-14 on:
 - The number and proportion who did/ did not spend time in temporary accommodation arranged by the local authority separately for households with/ without children.
 - For those who spent time in temporary accommodation the total amount of time in temporary accommodation, separately for households with and without children.

¹⁸ This is the quarterly HL2 return, available at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/RefTables>

¹⁹ These are part of the suite of ARC indicators introduced by the regulator, available at <http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/>

- Offers and refusals of temporary accommodation by accommodation type separately for households with/ without children.
- Satisfaction with temporary accommodation separately for households with/ without children.

Assessment and validation

The main purpose of the freedom of information requests was to get behind averages and understand numbers and proportions of homeless households who spent relatively short periods in temporary accommodation compared with those spending long periods. We sought to identify important differences in this regard in the experiences of households with children compared with other households, mainly single people.

While 23 local authorities responded to the freedom of information request, not all local authorities were able to provide information at the full level of detail requested. The main features of the coverage of the responses is set out in the table below.

Summary response to the freedom of information request

Question		Number of local authorities	Number of homeless households
Part 1: Whether household spent time in temporary accommodation arranged by the local authority	Total provided	21	21,500
	Households with/ without children provided	18	5,300 households with children 15,600 households without children
Part 1d: Total number of weeks of temporary accommodation provided.	Total provided	18	17,300
	Households with/ without children provided	13	3,000 households with children 9,500 households without children
Part 2: Households spending time in each type of temporary accommodation and total time spent.	Total provided. The FOI request did not ask for this data with/ without children.	27	30,796
Part 3: Offers of temporary accommodation by type and refusals by type.	Total provided	25	32,500
	Households with/ without children	15	4,400 households with children.

	provided		19,600 households without children.
Part 4: Satisfaction with temporary accommodation.	Total provided	20	3,500
	Households with/without children provided	7	300 households with children 1,500 households without children

The information gathered in parts 2, 3 and 4 of the freedom of information request was, for all households, also supplied in the ARC indicators to the Scottish Housing Regulator. For parts 3 and 4 the FOI request additionally asked for information separately for households with/ without children.

For parts 2-4 of the data collection, for all households, where it was possible to make a comparison with the ARC returns we compared these after the ARC data was published in September 2014. Overall, where the comparison could be made, the FOI and ARC data were identical or close.

Estimating the mean time in temporary accommodation

The ARC indicators ask for the following information for all households whose case was closed in 2013-14:

- The number of unique households spending time in each type of temporary accommodation.
- The total amount of time (in days) spent by these households in each of the types of temporary accommodation.

These data allow the calculation of the average (mean) amount of time spent by households **separately for each type** of temporary accommodation. However, they don't provide enough information to allow calculation of the overall average (mean) amount of time homeless households spend in total in temporary accommodation. This is because some households spend time in more than one type of temporary accommodation.

To address this we can incorporate evidence from the information which local authorities provide in the homelessness data supplied to Scottish Government in their HL1 statistics returns. These provide data on types of temporary accommodation – if any – occupied by each homeless household while their application is being assessed until the local authority discharges its homelessness duty. An ad hoc analysis of responses to this question, provided

by Scottish Government statisticians, showed that homeless households who had spent time in temporary accommodation on average occupied 1.25 separate types of temporary accommodation. This suggests that the majority of households spent time in only one type of temporary accommodation but around a quarter occupied two or more types.

Data supplied in the ARC returns showed 3,132,651 days of temporary accommodation were provided across all types and there were 31,113 unique households in total within each type of temporary accommodation. Using the evidence from the HL1 analysis that households on average occupy 1.25 types of accommodation, this gives an estimated 24,890 households spending a total of 3,132,651 days in temporary accommodation; an average of 126 days or 18 weeks.

Future developments

In 2014 Scottish Government statisticians introduced a new voluntary data collection, the HL3, designed to gather information about the use of temporary accommodation by each homeless household in a way that this could then be linked to data gathered on homelessness assessments, support provided and outcomes. They are currently consulting with local authority practitioners on the feasibility of developing this into a mandatory data collection.

Shelter Scotland welcomes this development, which would allow us to address some of the questions raised in this paper. In the meantime we will actively consider asking local authorities for equivalent information for all homeless households whose cases closed in 2014-15.