

# Statistical Analysis Report:

## Homelessness and prevention through Housing

### Options in 2015 – what does the data show?

December 2015

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## Key Points

- New data would seem to support the assertion that the reduction in the number of homeless applications made since 2009-10 is almost wholly due to the impact of housing options, rather than any change in the underlying causes of homelessness.
- Young people are over-represented in both housing options and homelessness services compared to over 25s.
- There is a high number of people with multiple and complex needs identified approaching both services, particularly in relation to physical and mental health, and dependency support needs: 38% of homeless applicants had one or more support needs.
- There is a large variation in the number, level and type of prevention activity delivered through housing options services throughout Scotland, demonstrating the differing levels of service available.
- Not all households who report being homeless (as their property type defines them as such) were recorded as being informed of their homeless rights through the housing options system: only 590 of the 1,327 approaches from rough sleepers were recorded as having been informed of their homeless rights, and similarly being informed of homeless rights was recorded 750 times for the 1,073 approaches from sofa-surfers.
- 200 people identified as long term roofless or sofa-surfing, and a further 900 prisoners, were recorded as remaining in their current accommodation as their housing options outcome. This highlights the importance when analysing this data of considering where and why the household made its approach in assessing whether their outcome was positive.
- Understanding the outcomes for households in housing need is limited in its current form. More analysis is needed at a household level – looking at the outcomes of households who have gone through the homeless route only and outcomes of people who have gone through the housing options route only, as well as those that have gone through both. This would create a clearer picture of the best route to a good outcome for households approaching their local authority for help with housing and would allow a better evaluation of the housing options service.

## Statistical summary

- In 2014-15, 65,191 households approached their local authority for help with housing through the homelessness or housing options service, or both. 35,764 homeless applications and 58,825 approaches to housing option services were made.
- The rate of homelessness varies between local authorities from 24.1 to 5.5 households being assessed as homeless in every 1,000 households, with a national average of 12.2 households assessed as homeless in every 1,000 in 2014-15.
- The rate of housing options approaches varies even more significantly – from 1.5 household in every 1,000 making a housing options approach to 57.6 households, with a national average of 24.3 in every 1,000 households making an approach.
- 117,375 preventative activities were carried out in 2014-15 across the 58,825 housing options approaches.
- For cases where contact was maintained until an outcome was achieved, half of all households using the housing options service made a homeless application, a fifth were helped to obtain alternative accommodation and 29% were recorded as remaining in their current accommodation.

## Introduction

This report differs from our previous reports on homelessness in Scotland in that, for the first time, it includes the new statistics on households seeking and receiving help from councils' housing options services. Since 2013 local authorities have been required to submit a statistical return, 'PREVENT1', developed to enable recording and monitoring of housing options services in each local authority. The first published annual analysis of this data was on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2015. These newly available statistics fill an important gap in our understanding of acute housing needs in Scotland and how these are being addressed.

Housing Options is a housing advice service that councils can use when someone approaches them with a housing problem and they want to look at what choices that person might have, aiming to prevent homelessness before it occurs. In some local authorities, the housing options and homelessness services are run concurrently, and in some they are run separately. However the housing options service differs from homelessness services in that there is no statutory duty associated with it.

This report looks at the circumstances of households going through both services, the types of help offered and the outcomes for these households where they are known. In the year to 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2015, more than 65,000 households approached Scottish councils' homelessness or housing options services for housing assistance. The report draws on statistics collected and published by the Scottish Government, and on additional analyses commissioned from the Scottish Government's Social Security and Housing Access statistics team.<sup>1</sup> This report provides an opportunity to look at these two sets of statistics in detail, concentrating on the first full set of housing options statistics, to help understand what the data can tell us about the experiences of households going through the two systems. As future statistics are released we will repeat this analysis.

Scotland has some of the most progressive homelessness legislation in the world, characterised by the '2012 commitment' made in the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all figures are taken from the following sources: Scottish Government, Operation of the Homeless Persons legislation in Scotland: 2014-15 and Housing Options (Prevent1) Statistics in Scotland: 2014-15, both available at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/RefTables>

2003, which extended the right to housing to all unintentionally homeless households from December 2012. From 2009-10 the Scottish Government promoted and supported local authorities in developing housing options services to complement their statutory homelessness services and to assist them in reaching this target, with the aim that housing options services will prevent homelessness occurring in the first place.

Since the introduction of the housing options initiative in 2009-10, the total number of households applying to councils for homelessness assistance has fallen substantially: from 54,054 households in 2009-10 to 34,597 in 2014-15.<sup>2</sup> The new statistics give us evidence about the extent to which this reduction has been due to homelessness prevention through housing options services. The statistics also give us new insights into the ways in which individual local authorities' housing options and homelessness services do or do not overlap, as well as comprehensive data on the preventative activities arranged by the local authority, and the outcomes for households approaching their housing options service for assistance.

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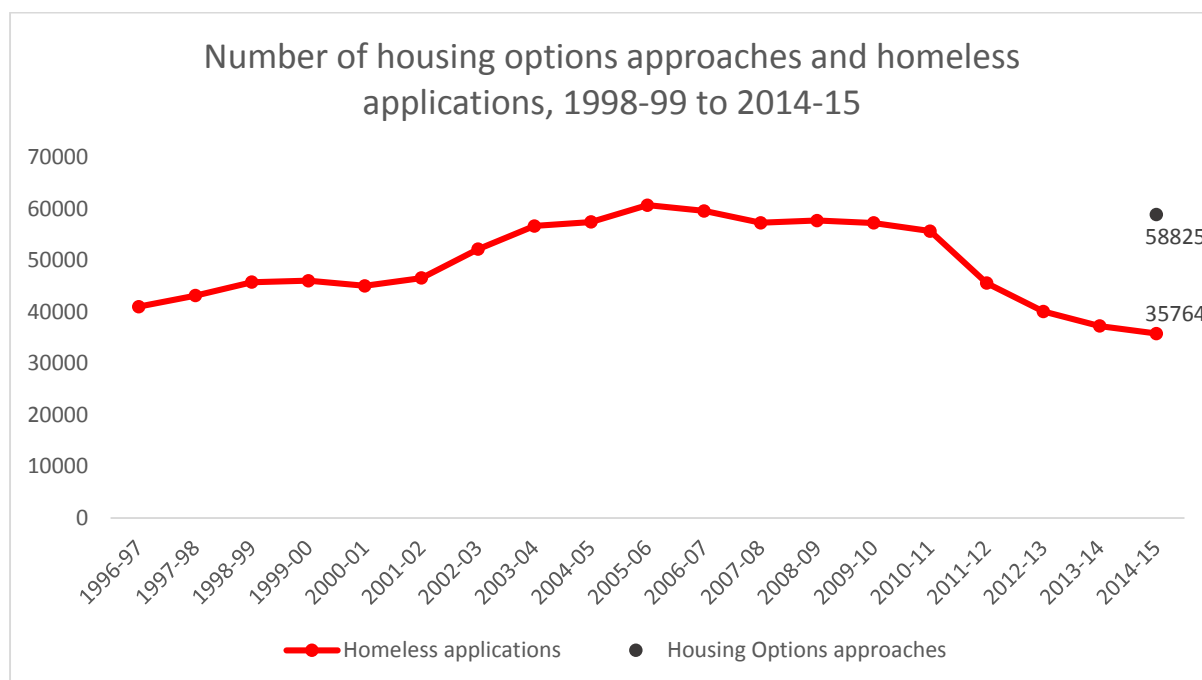
<sup>2</sup> Please note, these figures refer to unique households applying for assistance in the period, rather than the total number of applications.

# 1. How many people approach their local authority for housing assistance in Scotland?

In 2014-15, there were 35,764 homeless applications and 58,825 housing options approaches in Scotland. This equated to around 65,190 unique households approaching their local authority for assistance with housing in 2014-15, either through the homelessness or housing options service, or both.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 1 shows the trend in homelessness applications over the past 19 years, including the clear decrease in the number of homelessness applications from 2009-10.

**Figure 1:** Number of housing options approaches and homeless applications, 1996-97 to 2014-15



Note: the 2014-15 PREVENT1 dataset is the first annual statistical release on housing options, and therefore no trend data is available.

<sup>3</sup> Using additional analysis from the Scottish Government social security and housing access statistics team

### Impact of housing options on homelessness numbers

An ad-hoc analysis published by the Scottish Government's Social Security and Housing Access team<sup>4</sup> shows that around 65,190 households approached Scottish councils for homelessness or housing options assistance in 2014-15. Table 1 below, taken from the analysis, gives an overview of the types of assistance provided set against the types of reason the household needed assistance.

In total 34,620 households<sup>5</sup> made a homelessness application in the period and an additional 16,620 who needed help for a 'homelessness type reason' received housing options assistance only. The total number of households approaching their local authority homelessness or housing options service with a homeless housing need was therefore 51,240 in 2014-15. This figure is very similar to the number of homeless applications made in 2009-10 before the decline began in the number of applications, and when the promotion of housing options services started. This would seem to support the assertion that the reduction in the number of homeless applications made since 2009-10 is almost wholly due to the impact of housing options.

**Table 1:** Households seeking homelessness/ housing options help from councils in 2014-15

Types of service received	Homelessness type reason	Housing Options type reason	Total
<b>Housing options services only</b>	16,620	13,960	<b>30,580</b>
<b>Both housing options and homelessness services</b>	17,770	3,805	<b>21,575</b>
<b>Homelessness services only</b>	13,020	n.a.	<b>13,020</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>47,410</b>	<b>17,765</b>	<b>65,190</b>
<b>Total with a homeless type reason/ demonstrable homeless need<sup>6</sup></b>			<b>51,240</b>

Note: Totals may differ because of rounding

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/RefTables/adhoc-analysis/prevent1hl1hhsankey>

<sup>5</sup> This figure is made up of all households going through either the homelessness service only or the housing options and homelessness service.

<sup>6</sup> Identified by a recorded homeless type reason in their housing options approach, or receiving a homeless service either alone or in conjunction with a housing options service.



A similar conclusion was also highlighted in Crisis' 2015 Homelessness Monitor report, who determined the total homelessness approaches or presentations (rather than households) was around 54,000.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, there is a high number of 'hidden homeless', a group who by definition do not approach their local authority for assistance. Glasgow Homelessness Network for example recorded that only 39% of people using participating third sector services reported they had approached Glasgow City Council for homelessness assistance.<sup>8</sup> That there are a significant number of people in homeless need who are not accessing the homeless service has implications for local authorities in terms of quantifying demand and adequately resourcing their services. It also has implications for the households in question and whether they are choosing not to exercise their homelessness rights, or being prevented from doing so, and in understanding the outcomes for this group and whether it is worse, equal to, or better than the outcome they would have got by exercising their rights. Analysis later in the report looks at what the data can tell us about this.

### **The level of housing need in Scotland**

Through analysis of the Prevent1 data alongside the HL1 data, we can now determine the total figure of unique households making a housing options approach, or homeless application, or both, at 65,190 in 2014-15. This is a more comprehensive figure with which to chart the true level of housing need in Scotland than has previously been possible in solely looking at homeless application figures.

The funding pressures faced by statutory and voluntary sector homeless services must be viewed in light of the knowledge that, whilst homeless applications may have reduced, homelessness is as big a problem as ever, particularly in the context of ongoing cuts to welfare benefits.

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<sup>7</sup> Source: Crisis, The homelessness monitor: Scotland 2015, <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/homelessnessmonitor.html> Note: Our calculation looks at the number of unique households, rather than approaches and applications, and therefore concludes a slightly different figure.

<sup>8</sup> Source: Glasgow Homelessness Network, Annual Homelessness Monitoring, Report: April 2014 – March 2015 <http://www.ghn.org.uk/node/206>

It is important to acknowledge that housing options approaches and homelessness applications are not the only indications of housing need. Recent research commissioned by Shelter Scotland, SFHA and CIH Scotland identified the total need for new affordable housing in Scotland of 12,000 affordable homes each year for the next five years, based on a calculation of existing backlog need and newly arising housing need.<sup>9</sup> This research drew on the fact that 165,000 households in Scotland live in homes that are unfit for their needs. Housing need is also evidenced by the most recent statistics which show that on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2015 there were 10,666 households in temporary accommodation, including 4,896 children,<sup>10</sup> and 1 in 4 of these households will spend over 6 months in so-called 'temporary' accommodation,<sup>11</sup> demonstrating a backlog in the system as people wait for suitable settled accommodation to become available. In addition 940,000 households are in fuel poverty,<sup>12</sup> and 150,000 are on council waiting lists around Scotland.<sup>13</sup>

### **Overlap between homelessness and housing options services**

A third of households included in these statistics, 21,552, made both a housing options approach (for either homelessness type or prevention type reasons) and a homeless application in the year up to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015. This overlap of housing options and homelessness services varies significantly between local authorities. This variation is likely to be due to the way that the homeless and housing options services are structured, with applications in some areas being run concurrently and, in others, almost entirely separate from each other.

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<sup>9</sup> Powell, R., Dunning, R., Ferrari, E. and McKee, K., Affordable Housing Need in Scotland, Final Report – September 2015

[http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional\\_resources/policy\\_library/policy\\_library\\_folder/affordable\\_housing\\_need\\_-\\_final\\_report\\_september\\_2015](http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/affordable_housing_need_-_final_report_september_2015)

<sup>10</sup> Scottish Government, Quarterly Temporary Accommodation Reference Tables,

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/RefTables/PublicationTables2014-15>

<sup>11</sup> Shelter Scotland, The use of temporary accommodation in Scotland, published January 2015,

[http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional\\_resources/policy\\_library/policy\\_library\\_folder/the\\_use\\_of\\_temporary\\_accommodation\\_in\\_scotland](http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/the_use_of_temporary_accommodation_in_scotland) An update is due to this analysis in January 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Scottish Government, Scottish House Condition Survey – Key Findings 2013, published 2014

<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2014/12/6903>

<sup>13</sup> Scottish Government, Housing Statistics for Scotland – Housing lists, published September 2015

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/HSfS/HousingLists>

**Table 2:** Overlap of housing options and homeless services, by local authority

Percentage of all unique households approaching their council in housing need, going through both the housing options service and the homeless service in 2014-15	Local authority
Under 10% of all households	Clackmannanshire East Ayrshire East Dunbartonshire East Lothian East Renfrewshire Eilean Siar Midlothian Orkney South Lanarkshire
Over 50% of all households	Falkirk North Lanarkshire South Ayrshire West Dunbartonshire

Note: This overlap includes households making a housing options approach followed by a homeless application. In a very small number of additional cases, a housing options approach followed a homeless application.

### **The rate of homelessness and housing options approaches across Scotland**

The rate of homelessness<sup>14</sup> varies across Scotland, with 12.2 in every 1,000 households at the national level assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness. The rate is highest in West Dunbartonshire (24.1), Glasgow (17.3) and Edinburgh (16.6), and lowest in Inverclyde (5.5), Orkney (6.2), and Dumfries & Galloway (6.7).

The rate of housing options approaches varies much more significantly between local authorities than homeless assessments – the Scottish average is 24.3 approaches per 1,000 households. This ranges from 57.6 households in every 1,000 making a housing options approach in Aberdeen City (followed by West Dunbartonshire at 38.0 and Glasgow at 35.5) to 1.5 in every 1,000 households in Eilean Siar (followed by East Ayrshire at 2.7 and East Dunbartonshire at 3.0). That the housing options rate varies

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<sup>14</sup> All households assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness, as opposed to homelessness applications.

much more than the homeless rate implies a variation in the way housing options services are structured, rather than a variation in the level of housing need in area.

Statistical analysis shows that there is no relationship between the rate of housing options in a local authority area and the rate of homeless assessments, which further demonstrates that the rates of homelessness and housing options cannot be used alone to represent and compare the level of housing need across areas.

#### **Case study local authority – Aberdeen City**

- 57.6 households in every 1,000 make a housing options approach
- 11.9 households in every 1,000 are assessed as homeless

Aberdeen City has a much higher housing options approach rate than homeless rate, and it is notable that whilst the homeless rate in Aberdeen is well below the rate seen in other cities, the housing options rate is well above. This might indicate certain characteristics in this area. For example, it may be that the housing options service attracts a different demographic, or is dealing with a specific prominent problem in the area. Alternatively, it may indicate households are being diverted from making a homeless application and from accessing the associated statutory duty, or that homelessness is being successfully prevented through the housing options service. More than 80% of homeless applications in Aberdeen had been through the housing options service first, suggesting that the housing options service acts as a passage for homeless applications.

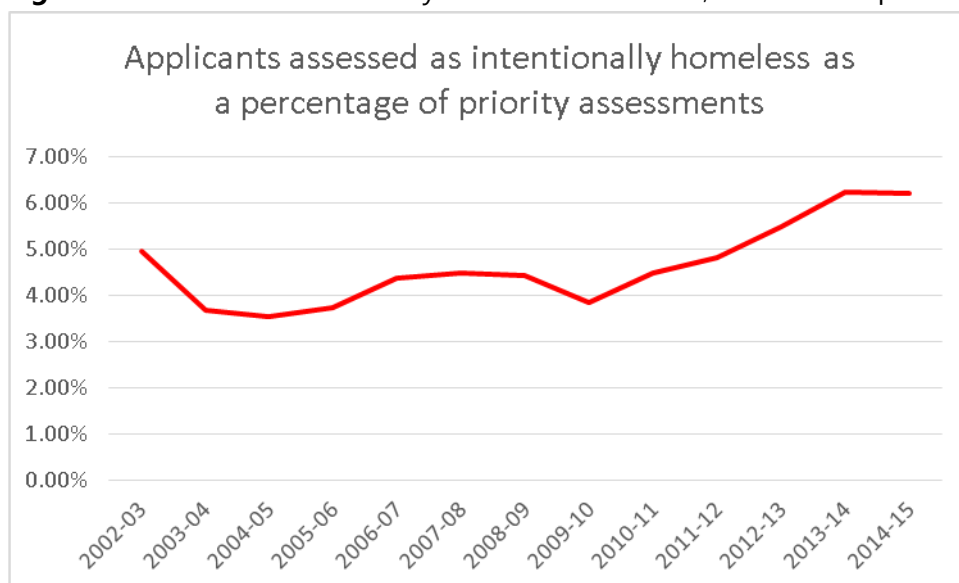
However, Aberdeen record 73% of their reasons for housing options approaches as 'prevention' rather than 'homeless type' reasons, which is much higher than the Scottish average of 34% for prevention type reasons. It is difficult to ascertain whether there is a fundamental difference in housing options approaches in Aberdeen, because 24% of their reasons are unclassified prevention reasons (recorded as 'other'), accounting for 1,485 of the 2,485 Scottish 'other' prevention reasons. It may mean there are some special circumstances in Aberdeen that don't fall under other named categories, thus explaining their high proportion of housing options approaches. Equally, it could be a difference in coding as they record 0% of their prevention reasons as 'general housing options advice'. Further qualitative evidence is needed to understand the full picture.

## Homelessness assessments trends

When looking further at the national homelessness statistics, 29,565 applications were assessed as homeless or threatened as homeless in 2014-15, 1,539 as not homeless and 1,834 as intentionally homeless<sup>15</sup>. The number of households assessed as homeless has reduced by 521 cases compared with 2013-14, though proportionally is slightly higher at 82% of all assessments (up from 81% in 2013-14), but the proportion of intentionality decisions has gone up too – thereby limiting the duty of the local authority to assist these households.

Local authorities apply a test of 'intentionality' by looking at if a household did or didn't do something that led to their homelessness. Since the removal of the 'priority need' assessment stage in 2012, intentionality is now considered for all homeless households, rather than only for those meeting the priority need criteria. As such, you might expect the number of intentionality decisions to rise as more people are being assessed. However, intentionality decisions as a proportion of homeless priority assessments have also been increasing since 2009-10, reaching a peak in 2013-14 and now at over 6%. Further evidence is required to determine whether this is the result of an underlying change in the causes of homelessness or other factors.

**Figure 2:** Trends in intentionally homeless decisions, 2002-03 to present



The proportion of homeless applicants assessed as 'intentionally' homeless varies across local authority. In 2014, whilst 6.1% of households assessed as homeless (or threatened

<sup>15</sup> These figures have all been calculated based on the financial year of assessment.

with homelessness) were assessed as intentionally homeless on average across Scotland, in Aberdeen City it was 18% of assessments, in Falkirk 16.5%, and in Moray 16.3%.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Scottish Government, Homelessness statistics October to December 2014 – publication, Table 5  
<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/RefTables/HomelessOcttoDec2014>

## 2. Who approached their local authority for help with housing?

### Household characteristics

The age demographic for housing options approaches and homelessness applications was broadly similar, as was the gender split and patterns by household type, with both services dominated by single young people.

- **Gender:** 52% of housing options approaches are made by households headed by a male. This was slightly lower than the proportion of males who made homeless applications, which stood at 55%.
- **Household type:** 76% of housing options approaches are made by single people, compared to 66% of homeless applications. This difference is due to more single females making housing options approaches.
- **Age:** Compared to the Scottish population, housing options approaches are more likely to come from younger age groups – there are 25.1 housing options approaches for every 1,000 individuals under 25, and 11.9 approaches for every 1,000 individuals between 25 and 65 years old.<sup>17</sup> This is similar to the picture for homelessness, where 13.3 in every 1,000 young people were assessed as homeless, compared to 5.7 in every 1,000 individuals over the age of 25 (and under 65). However, there are a greater proportion of over 40s making housing option approaches (32% of housing option approaches) compared with homeless applications (28% of applications).
- **Vulnerability and support needs:**<sup>18</sup> 11,318 homeless applicants were identified by the homelessness officer as having one or more support needs during their

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<sup>17</sup> All rates calculated using the NRS population estimates for 2014, rather than using statistics on the number of households because of the high proportion of single applicants. Source: National Records of Scotland, Mid-2014 Population Estimates Scotland, <http://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/population/population-estimates/mid-year-population-estimates/mid-2014>

<sup>18</sup> From 1st June 2013 local authorities have had the duty under the Housing Support Services (Homelessness) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 to identify households who have been assessed as unintentionally homeless or threatened with homelessness who may have a support need, to assess whether the household needs support, and if so, to provide this. 54% of households who

homeless assessment, equating to 38% of the 29,565 households assessed as homeless. This had increased from 34% in 2013-14. The biggest assessed needs for support were around mental health (14% of all assessed as homeless), alcohol or dependency problems (11%) and basic housing management (18%). In 2014-15, there was also an increase in the number of homeless applications reporting an additional factor in failing to maintain their accommodation. In 3,010 of these case mental health needs were identified as an additional factor (16% of these cases, up 4% from 2013-14), physical health needs (identified in 1,412 or 8% of these cases and up 3% from 2013-14), and drug or alcohol dependency (recorded for 2,799 applicants, or 15% of these cases and an increase of 1% from 2013-14).<sup>19</sup> These figures paint a picture of a homeless service increasingly working with applicants with multiple and complex needs. Comparable data is collected for households making a housing options approach, with mental health needs identified in 6,565 approaches, physical health needs in 4,790, and drug or alcohol dependency in 5,630 approaches.

### **Repeat homelessness and housing option approaches**

There were 58,825 housing options approaches in 2014-15 undertaken by 52,165 unique households. The vast majority (90%) of households approached their local authority only once during 2014-15 for housing options services, but 1 in 10 approached their local authority multiple times: 4,660 households made 2 approaches and 780 made 3+ approaches. This was particularly high in Glasgow where 14% of households made 2 approaches and a further 4% made 3 or more approaches within the year.

The local authority has discretion over when to close a housing options case, so this may account for the higher number of repeats in comparison to homeless applications: in 2014-15 97% of households made one homeless application, 3% made two applications and a further 49 households made 3 or more applications. 7.2% of households previously assessed as homeless in 2014-15 were reassessed as homeless within a year

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met this criteria and whose case closed in the period were assessed under this duty, and 49% were found to have a support need identified. This is separate from the data above, which has been asked in the HL1 since before the duty was implemented, and is part of the homeless assessment.

<sup>19</sup> This question was only completed for 52% of all applications.



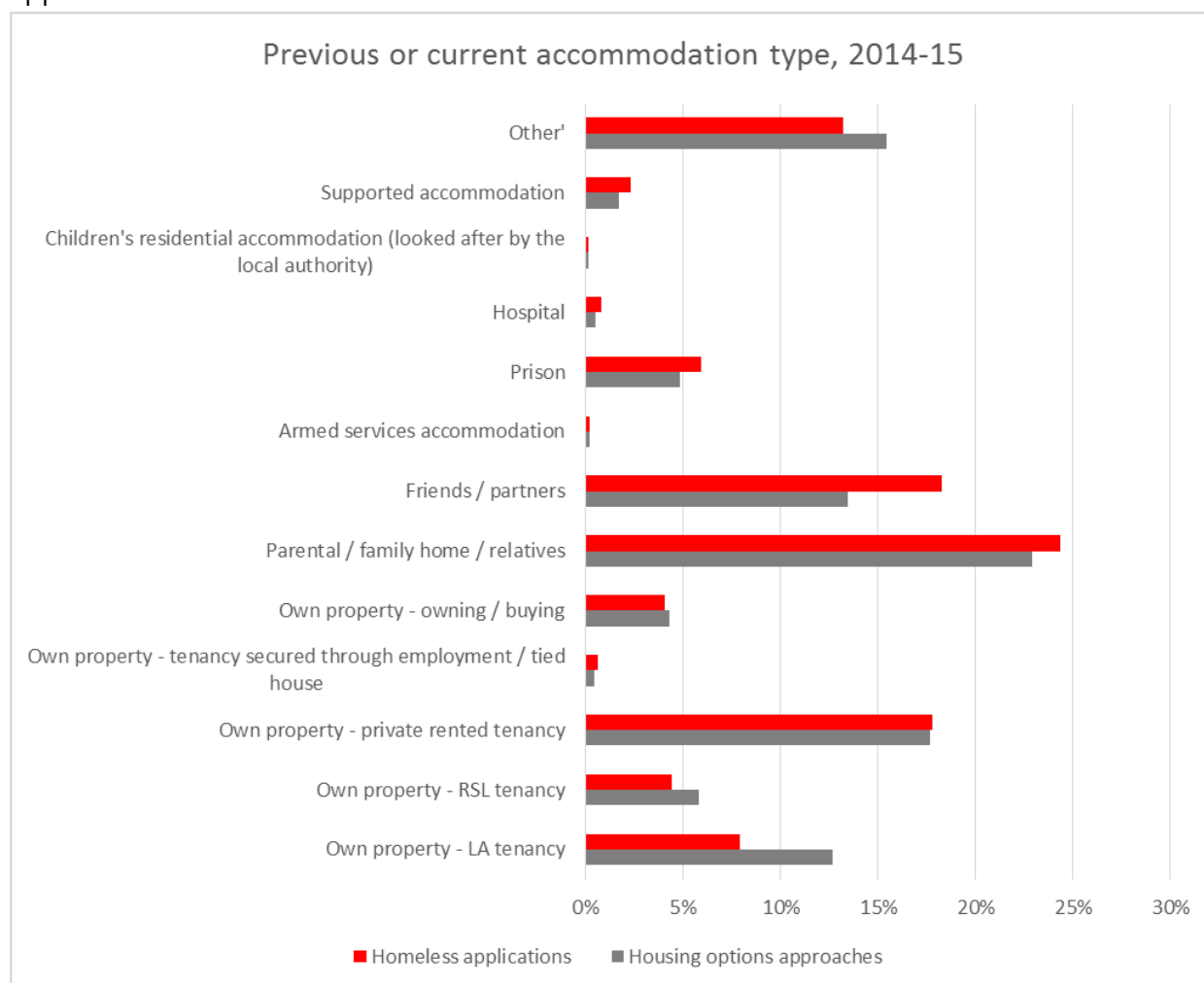
of closure of their previous case. This has increased from 5.6% in 2012-13, and suggests that the homeless services may now be dealing with more complex cases.

In addition and as detailed earlier in this report, 21,552 households, made both a housing options approach and a homeless application in the year up to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015.

### What type of accommodation did people approach their local authority from?

The prior housing circumstances of all homeless applicants is recorded when making a homeless application, whilst the current accommodation type of those making a housing options approach is recorded. This difference is because people making a homeless application are, by definition, less likely to be able to give current accommodation information. There are very similar patterns between the two services, with the majority of approaches and applications from people staying with their family, friends or partners.

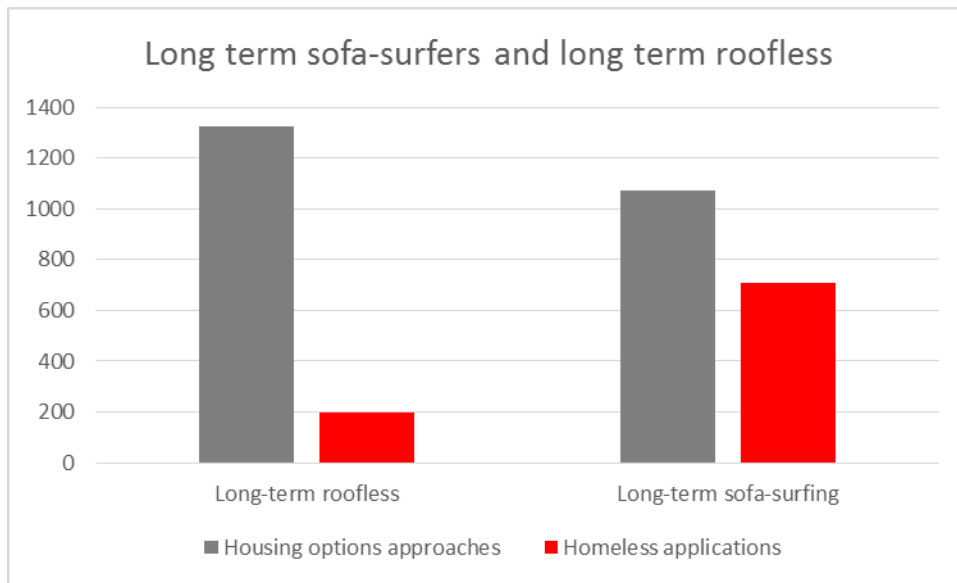
**Figure 3:** Accommodation type when making a housing options approach or homeless application



The highest proportion of homeless applications is made from individuals staying in the parental or family home, or with relatives (totalling 43%). This is in line with the fact that the biggest reason for homelessness is a relationship breakdown, totalling 54% of reasons for homelessness: this is made up of a violent dispute within the household (17%), non-violent dispute within the household (12%), or being asked to leave (25%). Homeless applications are disproportionately concentrated in younger age groups, who are more likely to be living with family than older age groups are. These figures suggest that the required or desired housing options to prevent homelessness are not freely available for these newly forming households. For example, unaffordable rents making the private rented sector unattainable, and limited one-bedroom social rented stock. Housing options for younger people are further restricted by the extension of the shared accommodation rate, limiting entitlement to housing benefit to the amount of renting a room in a shared property for under-35s.

There are more housing options approaches from people with local authority tenancies (13%) than homelessness applications (8%). This may suggest that people in social tenancies are either more likely to have a less severe housing need than homelessness, or that homelessness is easier to prevent for those in social tenancies. Proportionally less housing options approaches are by people staying with friends or a partner (accounting for 13% of housing options approaches but 18% of homeless applications). This may suggest that people staying with friends or a partner are more likely to wait until their situation is at crisis point to approach the local authority, or that homelessness is less preventable in these situations.

**Figure 4:** Number of housing options approaches and homeless applications from long-term sofa-surfers and long-term roofless



There are more housing options approaches from households recorded as long-term roofless (1,327 or 4%) than homeless applications (197 or 1%). Similarly, the number in the housing options system recorded as long-term sofa-surfing was higher (1,073 or 2% of housing options approaches, or 709 or 2% of homeless applicants).

This is an interesting group as they are individuals with no tenancy rights, and who are, by definition, homeless (whether they have been assessed in the past or not). It may be that these households making a housing options approach, rather than a homeless application, may have previously applied and been assessed as intentionally homeless and the local authority may have discharged their duty. If a household has not had a change of circumstance, the local authority does not have to accept another homeless application from them. This might mean that households are looking to the housing options system instead to meet their needs. We look later in this report at whether this is a successful strategy in achieving positive outcomes for these households.

### 3. Why do households approach their local authority for help with housing?

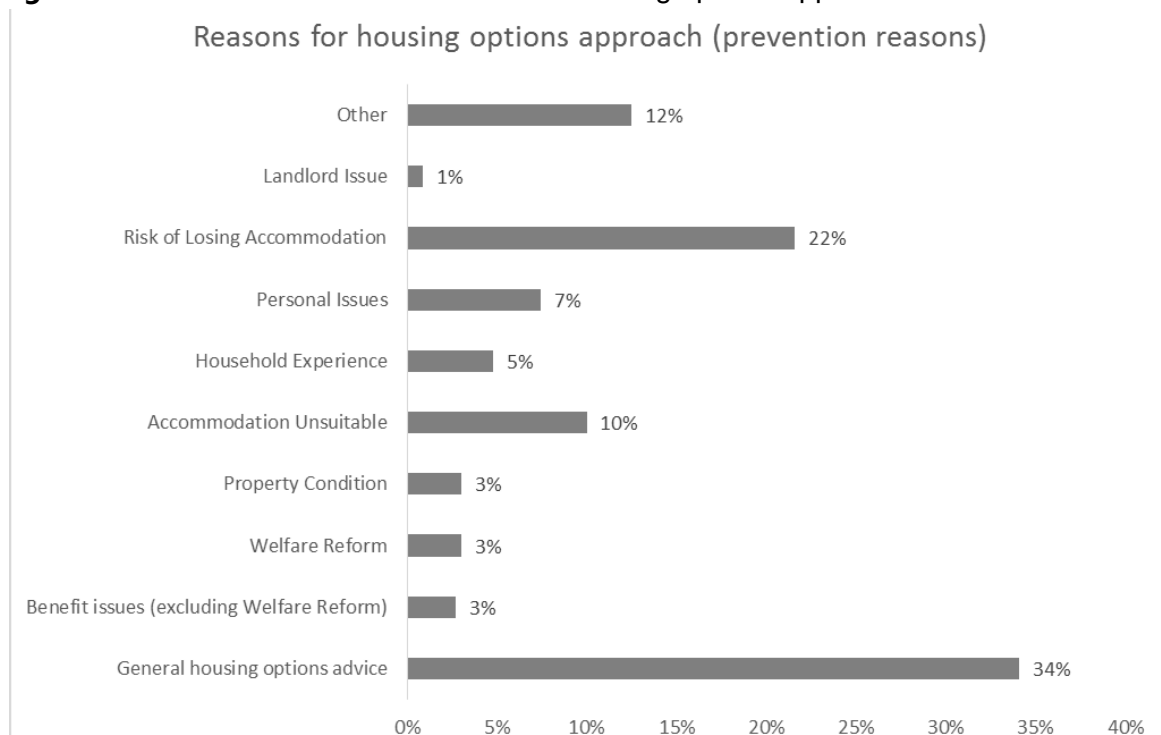
The reasons a household made a housing options approach are split into two categories:

1. 'prevention' type reasons, which make up 34% of approaches
2. 'homelessness' type reasons which make up 66% of all approaches and which match the reasons that can be recorded in the HL1.

#### 1. Prevention type reasons

Prevention type reasons included approaches for general housing options advice (34% of all prevention type reasons), being at risk of losing accommodation (22%), and approaching due to the accommodation being unsuitable (10%). There was also a high proportion of 'other' recorded at 12% of all prevention type reasons, with 57% of this choice concentrated in Aberdeen City.

**Figure 5:** 'Prevention' reasons recorded for housing options approaches 2014-15



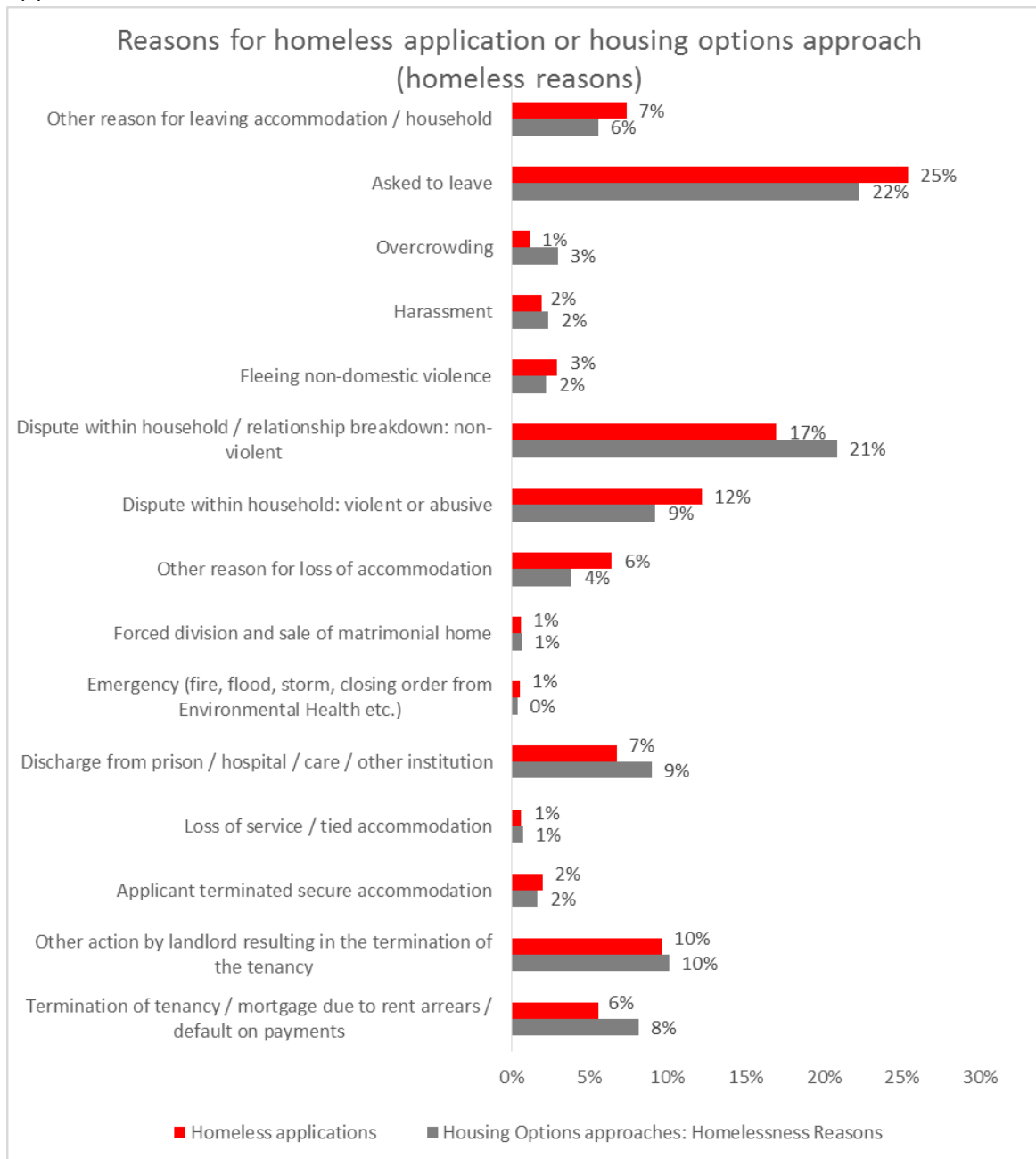
## 2. Homeless type reasons

The homeless type reasons that can be recorded on the housing options database are comparable with the reasons recorded for making homeless applications, as shown in figure 6. There is a pattern of consistency in the main reasons recorded for both making a homeless application and making a housing options approach, with being asked to leave<sup>20</sup> and relationship breakdown reasons high on both lists. There was a slightly higher proportion of housing options approaches made because of rent or mortgage arrears than there were homeless applications. There was also a slightly higher proportion of housing options approaches made because of discharge from some kind of institutional care including prison or hospital.

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<sup>20</sup> Being asked to leave covers circumstances where the applicant has been asked to leave the households of which they were previously part - for example, a person who has reached an age that prohibits the household claiming child benefit on their behalf.

**Figure 6:** Homeless type reasons recorded for housing options approaches and homeless applications



## **4. What prevention activities were undertaken by local authorities?**

Local authorities can carry out a number of activities to prevent homelessness through their housing options service, and they may ask another organisation to complete these activities too. More than one activity can be counted for each housing options approach: in 2014-15, 117,375 activities were carried out across the 58,825 approaches.

### **What level of prevention activities were undertaken by local authorities?**

Activities are recorded at different levels – type I involves information, signposting and explanation, type II entails casework, and type III activities are advocacy, representation and mediation at tribunal or court level.

For the majority of approaches, activities did not exceed type I level (56% approaches) and for the remaining 44% of approaches activities did not exceed type II level (44% approaches). In only 230 approaches was a type III level activity carried out. In both Falkirk and East Ayrshire, 100% of activities were at a type I level. In contrast, over 95% of approaches in East Lothian and North Ayrshire had activities reaching type II. This indicates that there is a different level of service being carried out around the country. With the current information available it is difficult to determine whether or not this relates to different outcomes for people.

Of the 117,375 activities, 75,150 were type I, 41,900 at type II, and 325 were at type III. Given there were only 230 approaches by households that received a type III level activity, this means some of these approaches received multiple type III level activities.

### **How many activities did each approach have?**

The number of activities recorded for each prevention approach also varies hugely across some local authorities.

- In Aberdeen, Argyll and Bute, Edinburgh, Glasgow, South Ayrshire and Stirling, over 90% of approaches had just 1 activity recorded. Across Scotland, 61% of approaches had just 1 activity recorded.

- Conversely, there were high levels of approaches with 4 or more activities recorded in East Lothian (94%), Falkirk (87%) and East Ayrshire (72%)<sup>21</sup>. Across Scotland, 12% of approaches had 4 or more activities recorded. Whilst all activities in Falkirk and East Ayrshire were recorded at a type I level, therefore it might be expected there was multiple activities provided, in East Lothian 95% of approaches reached a type II level activity.

### **What were the prevention activities delivered?**

A wide range of prevention activities can be recorded. The most common activities are general housing advice, information and assistance (provided 41,260 times, or making up 35% of all activities), and informing the client of their homelessness rights (30,045, or 26% of all activities).

The type of activities delivered varies by local authority:

- There were high proportions of money advice in Clackmannanshire (18%), Eilean Siar (15%) and West Lothian (10%) compared to the Scottish average (2%).
- Assistance in accessing the rent deposit guarantee scheme was particularly high in certain authorities. Across Scotland it made up 4% of activities, in comparison to Clackmannanshire (26%), East Dunbartonshire (11%), Eilean Siar (15%), Fife (12%), North Ayrshire (20%), Perth and Kinross (16%) and Scottish Borders (10%).
- Inverclyde had a particularly high proportion of activities recorded as liaising with landlords (20% compared to the Scottish average of 2%).
- Referral to social work services was high in Glasgow (13% compared to the Scottish average of 2%), and
- 69% of all activities in Dundee, and 68% of all activities in West Dunbartonshire related to informing individuals of their homeless rights, much higher than the Scottish average of 26%. Conversely, this made up a low proportion of Argyll and Bute's (4%) and East Ayrshire's (9%) activities.

The variation between local authorities is related to the freedom they have been afforded in relation to the design of their housing options services and, arguably, the lack of guidance that has been available to date for local authorities in how to deliver housing options. This makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the service, and to know what a 'good' housing options service is, and conversely what might be poorer

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<sup>21</sup> NB: East Lothian & East Ayrshire had under 500 approaches recorded for the year.



practice. In order to evaluate the different approaches taken we need more information about outcomes for individuals and qualitative data on what works.

However, there are some elements of service that you could reasonably expect to see in relation to activities recorded for certain housing options approaches. For example, for individuals approaching the service who have been recorded as long-term roofless or long-term sofa surfing, it is reasonable to expect that all these individuals should be informed of their right to make a homeless application – even if you might not be able to assume that they would all make a homeless application as their recorded outcome. In fact, not all of the households who report being homeless (as their property type defines them as such) were recorded as being informed of their homeless rights:

- there were 1,327 approaches from long term roofless, whilst being informed of homeless rights was only recorded 590 times for this group.
- there were 1,073 approaches recorded as long-term sofa surfers, with only 750 'informing of homeless rights' activities recorded.

As more than one activity can be recorded at different levels per household, it is not certain how many households were actually informed of their homeless rights.

Equally, you could reasonably argue that all of the households making a housing options approach with a defined 'homeless' type reason should have been informed of their rights under the homeless legislation as (at least one of) their activities, or at least more often than those approaching with a prevention type reason. In reality, the difference is small – 21,230 people with a homelessness type reason were informed of their rights under the homelessness legislation (54.5% of all approaches with a homeless type reason), compared to 7,265 of those with a prevention type reason (36.5%).

### **Who delivered the prevention activity?**

The local authority can arrange for other organisations to deliver prevention activities, although the local authority has responsibility for recording these and any outcomes. The majority of activities (80%) are undertaken by local authority housing departments. However, 10% of activities were carried out by social work departments. This was particularly apparent – as might be expected – in stock transfer local authorities. In other local authorities, there were distinct patterns, for example in Fife 66% of activities were performed by other voluntary agencies compared to the Scottish average of 5%.

## **5. What were the outcomes for individuals approaching their housing options service or making a homeless application?**

In assessing the impact of the development of the housing options approach to homelessness prevention one of the key issues is how the outcomes for those receiving only housing options assistance compare with the outcomes for households making a homeless application.

### **How long were homeless and housing options cases open?**

For housing options, there is no statutory duty to provide support, and the local authority has discretion over when to open and close a case. This leads to large variation in the number of cases open at the end of the financial year in each local authority area, and the duration of each case.

- 17% of all housing options cases started in 2014-15 were still open at the end of the financial year. This varied from 42% in Aberdeen City, to 0% in Dundee and Eilean Siar.
- The number of cases that were opened in 2014-15 where the household was still awaiting the outcome of their application or approach was notably higher for those making a homeless application (15,070, or 44% of applications) than for those receiving housing options assistance only (6,560, or 21% of approaches). You would expect this to be the case as there is a long assessment process with homeless households, and a statutory duty associated before a case can be closed.

With regards to the duration of housing options cases, half (51%) of all cases in Scotland were closed in less than 30 days: over three quarters of all cases that were closed in this time were in Dundee (78%) and West Dunbartonshire (79%). One fifth of cases in Scotland had a longer case duration of 60 or more days (19%). In four local authorities, over half of their cases took this long: East Ayrshire (52%), East Renfrewshire (68%), Eilean Siar (75%), Falkirk (55%) and Orkney (75%).

As a comparison, for applicants assessed as homeless, only 5% of cases were closed in a month, whilst 63% took over 4 months from application to case closure. Indeed, Shelter Scotland analysis of local authority data gathered from a freedom of information request shows that households can spend long periods in temporary accommodation before alternative accommodation is found and a case can be closed: data from 2013-14 showed that 1 in 10 households spend over 1 year in so-called 'temporary' accommodation.<sup>22</sup> For homeless applicants who were assessed as not homeless, 28% of cases were completed in 1 month, and 13% took over 4 months.

### **In how many cases was contact lost with household, or was the outcome unknown?**

Contact was lost with 5,105 households making a housing options approach in 2014-15, accounting for 9% of all approaches. There was a further 2,440 cases (4%) recorded as having an unknown outcome.

For the homelessness service, contact was lost with 1,687 (5%) cases before assessment, and 4,193 (12%) cases after assessment. There was a further 1,394 (4%) of cases where the applicant withdrew their application before assessment, 82 cases where the applicant was ineligible for assistance, and 1,490 (4%) where homelessness was resolved prior to assessment.

For households with whom contact was lost, we cannot determine whether or not they had a positive outcome.

### **Outcomes for housing options cases where contact was maintained**

For housing options approaches where contact was maintained (41,310), households:

1. made a homeless application in 51% of cases (21,325),
2. remained in their current accommodation for 29% (12,065), and
3. obtained alternative accommodation in 19% of cases (7,925).

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<sup>22</sup> Shelter Scotland, The use of temporary accommodation in Scotland, published January 2015, [http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional\\_resources/policy\\_library/policy\\_library\\_folder/the\\_use\\_of\\_temporary\\_accommodation\\_in\\_scotland](http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/the_use_of_temporary_accommodation_in_scotland) An update is due to this analysis in October 2015.

For an outcome to be positive or negative will be intrinsically linked to the reason for the household's approach to the council and the property type they approach from. In addition, there is an unanswered question about sustainability of outcomes, particularly where a household has been supported to remain in their current accommodation. Further analysis at the household level to track repeat approaches to the council and potential future homeless applications will allow us some insight into this.

### **1. Outcome is 'made a homeless application'**

For the 21,325 who made a homeless application this represents the next step in their housing journey, rather than a final outcome. It varies largely by local authority, accounting for 3% of outcomes in Midlothian to 77% in West Dunbartonshire. You might expect some groups to be more likely to have this as their outcome, for example long term roofless and sofa surfers. However, less than half of this group (44.2% of long-term roofless and 47.4% of sofa surfers) made a homeless application as their outcome. However, a relatively high proportion of cases from this group were still open (28.7% and 12.1%). 45% of those who made a housing options approach for 'homelessness type' reasons went on to make a homeless application as their recorded outcome (compared to 20% of those with a 'prevention type' reason). The Scottish Government Housing Options Statistics in Scotland 2014-15 publication<sup>23</sup> suggests this may mean that homelessness has been prevented for the other 55% of housing options approaches with homelessness type reasons:

*“There were 38,935 approaches which were closed where the approach was made for a “homelessness” type reason (i.e. because the household had to leave their accommodation or their accommodation was no longer available). Of these, 17,360 (45%) went on to make a homelessness application. This suggests that homelessness may have been prevented by housing options services for the remaining 21,575 approaches (55%), although the counterfactual will never be known.”*

However, analysis below shows that alternative outcomes, for example remaining in current accommodation, may not be the positive outcome for households it is portrayed as.

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<sup>23</sup> Scottish Government, Housing Options (PREVENT1) Statistics in Scotland 2014-15, p8

## **2. Outcome is 'remained in current accommodation'**

Over a fifth of housing options approaches from tenants in the social or private rented sector, and owner occupied properties had an outcome recorded as remaining in their current accommodation. It might be assumed that for these people, homelessness was prevented, however we would need to understand the reason for approach and the activities undertaken for these groups in order to draw a full conclusion about whether this was a positive outcome for them. For example, remaining in current accommodation for an owner occupier who received money advice and was able to better budget or had an increased income as a result of preventative activities delivered through the housing options service would be a good outcome. But remaining in the accommodation it would not be a good outcome for an individual in a violent domestic abuse situation who shared a tenancy with their partner.

For certain groups, remaining in their current accommodation is clearly an unsatisfactory outcome:

- 70 (5.3%) approaches from 'long-term roofless' and 130 (12.1%) approaches from 'long-term sofa surfing' had an outcome recorded as 'remained in current accommodation'.
- 31.6% of applications (905) from people recording prison as their property type remained in their current accommodation.

Without analysing the outcomes data with reference to where the households came from initially, you might include these groups as a good news story where homelessness was prevented. In addition, there is an unanswered question from the statistics on whether helping a household to return to their current accommodation leads to a sustainable outcome. As such, at this point it cannot be assumed that remaining in current accommodation is always a positive outcome for individuals through the housing options route and more analysis, both qualitative and quantitative, must be done before this question can be answered.

## **3. Outcome is 'obtained alternative accommodation'**

7,925 housing options cases (17%) were recorded as having obtained alternative accommodation after going through the service.

- 1,975 (25%) obtained a private rented sector tenancy

- 1,315 (17%) obtained a local authority tenancy, and 510 (6%) obtained a tenancy with a housing association
- 1,375 (17%) moved in with friends and relatives
- 445 (6%) had prison recorded as their rehousing outcome. This is in addition to the 905 who were recorded as remaining in prison as their previous accommodation type.

One reason for looking at the rehousing outcomes of those who have gone through the housing options route is to compare it to the rehousing outcomes of those who have gone through the homeless route – and thus to determine effective routes for getting into social housing, for example. As such, a comparison with these outcomes in the homelessness route has been made below.

### **Outcomes for homelessness cases where contact was maintained**

Since the removal of the priority need test in 2012, all households who are assessed as unintentionally homeless are entitled to permanent settled accommodation. For households assessed as intentionally homeless, they are entitled to advice and assistance and temporary accommodation for a reasonable period (usually taken to mean 28 days).

There are two sources of information useful for understanding the final outcomes of homeless applicants. One is the final duty discharge action taken by the local authority, and the other is the final rehousing outcome. As some applicants will have sourced alternative accommodation themselves, these two sources of information may differ.

When looking at duty discharge action taken by local authorities during 2014-15 for applicants assessed as unintentionally homeless, 15,468 (57%) were offered and accepted a social rented tenancy, and 1,124 (4%) were offered and accepted a private rented tenancy. The published statistics also showed 1,147 were offered and accepted temporary accommodation as their duty discharge action, and 208 did not accept this temporary accommodation as their duty discharge.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> This is an unlawful discharge of duty, and local authorities will have received a warning on their coding of these cases from the Scottish Government social security and housing access statistics team when they submitted their statistical return. However, we have queried this with the four local authorities that had the highest number of these cases. They reported that in the majority of these cases, the local authority provided temporary accommodation until the applicant

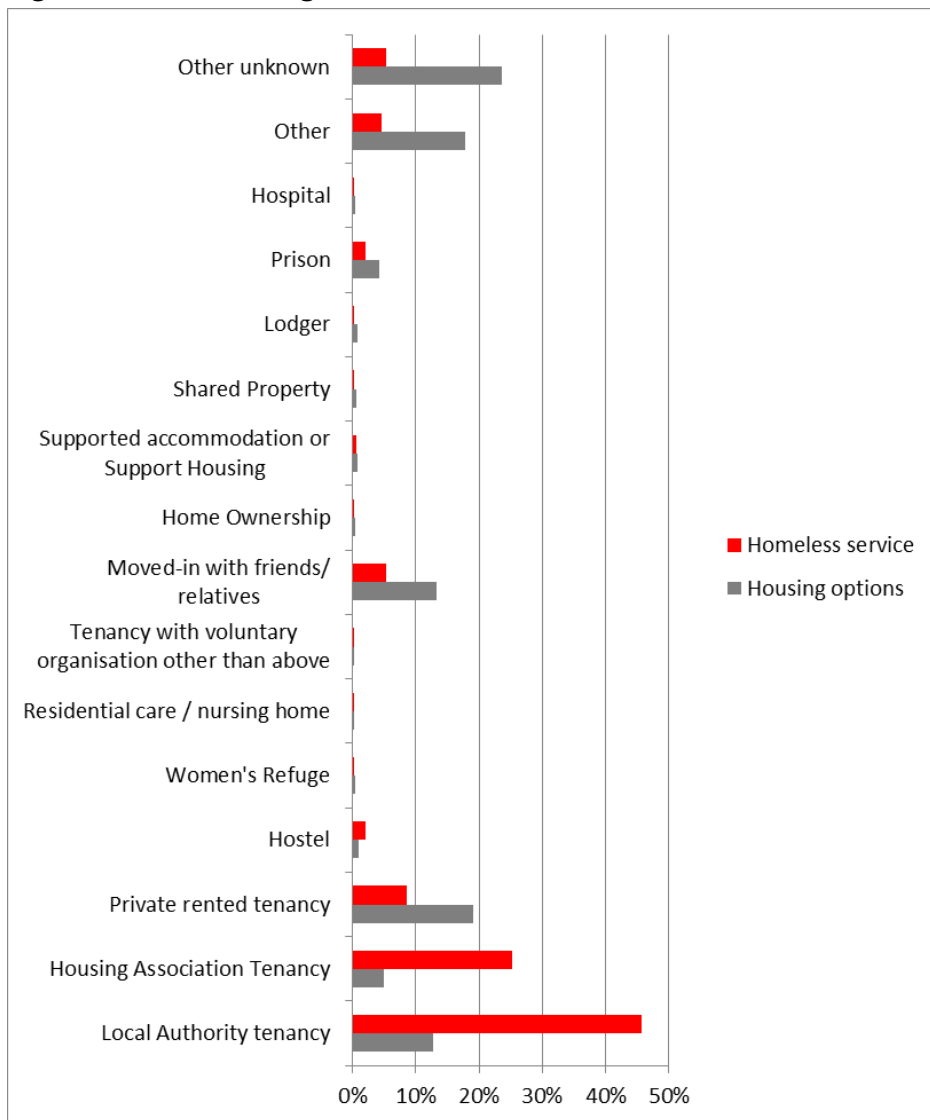
Contact was maintained until case closure stage for 25,740 homeless applicants (this includes 1,239 assessed as not homeless). The final rehousing outcomes for applicants were:

- 10,712 obtained a local authority tenancy, and 5,955 a tenancy with a housing association: (65% in total had a social rented tenancy as a final outcome)
- 2,054 (8%) obtained a private rented sector tenancy
- 1,898 (7%) returned to their previous accommodation
- 1,364 (5%) moved in with friends or relatives

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resolved their own homelessness. The provision of temporary accommodation was the latest action taken by the local authority, and therefore it is recorded as the final action. This may suggest the need for further guidance or clarification in the recording options to ensure that a more accurate representation of the local authority's duty discharge action is possible.

**Figure 7: Final housing outcome<sup>25</sup>**



As might be expected, there is a higher proportion of homeless cases that have an outcome of a local authority or housing association tenancy. However, this analysis is limited in its current form and assumes two unique services run separately. A better analysis would look at the outcomes of households who have gone through the homeless route only and outcomes of people who have gone through the housing options route only, as well as those that have gone through both. This would create a clearer picture of the best route to a good outcome for households in housing need and would allow a better evaluation of the housing options service.

<sup>25</sup> Where contact was maintained until duty discharge, and excluding those who remained in current accommodation for housing options (12,065) and homeless applicants (1,206). Only includes homeless cases where applicant was assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness.



## Findings and recommendations

There is a difficulty in comparing the outcomes of households going through the housing options and homelessness services. Local authorities have to fulfil a statutory duty when someone applies as homeless, with different levels of support required depending on how the household is assessed. As such, there is an expectation of some consistency of service and response throughout Scotland. For housing options, there is no such statutory duty, and as reflected on throughout this document there are large differences in practice with Scottish local authorities, which all design and deliver their housing options services in different ways. We therefore welcome the imminent publication of Housing Options Guidance, which should result in a more consistent approach across Scotland.

**Recommendation:** the Scottish Housing Regulator should monitor the impact of the Guidance on the delivery of housing options, including in a follow up thematic enquiry into homelessness and housing options.

The context behind the move towards a preventative approach to homelessness and the introduction of housing options was partly to relieve pressure on homelessness services following the abolition of the priority need test. As such, and with the introduction of the PREVENT1 return to capture data on housing options, there is a need use this data to develop understanding. This should include analysis of how housing options services are run, how housing options interacts with the statutory homelessness duties, whether this approach is providing positive outcomes, and whether local authorities are effectively and genuinely preventing homelessness.

**Recommendation:** more statistical analysis is required at the household level to understand the journey for households through the two systems, rather than solely looking at the services independently.<sup>26</sup>

The high number of people with vulnerabilities identified approaching both services raises questions regarding how well the system responds to them. Shelter Scotland is

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<sup>26</sup> For example, following on from the Scottish Government's recently published Sankey Diagram data: Scottish Government, PREVENT1 and HL1 Household Outcome Analysis: 2014/15, available at <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/RefTables/adhoc-analysis>

currently undertaking research into the experiences of people with multiple and complex needs, which will be published early 2016.

**Recommendation:** work should be carried out to further understand how to best deliver accessible and effective services for people with multiple vulnerabilities