

Report

Homelessness annual report - 2006

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Shelter

Homelessness annual report - 2006

Executive summary

This report is based on analysis of the Scottish Executive annual statistics on homelessness in Scotland 2005-06¹.

What is homelessness? (Section 1)

The report starts with a summary of the current legislation on homelessness in Scotland to provide a context for examining the statistics.

The scale of homelessness (Section 2)

Approximately **55000 households** were **assessed** by their local authority in 2005-06 and **almost 40,000 (73 per cent) of these were defined as homeless**.

The remaining households were not considered to be homeless by the council (although this includes those who also lost contact with the council; withdrew their application; or had it resolved before any assessment) thus the local authority has no duty to provide them with housing.

The figures for those assessed as homeless may under represent the scale of homelessness in Scotland today as they only include people who have approached their local authority. For example, the Scottish Household Survey revealed that only 64 per cent of households who had experienced homelessness had approached their local authority for assistance.² The Homelessness Monitoring Group has acknowledged this and aims to make homelessness more visible.

The reasons for homelessness (Section 3)

The major causes of homeless, such as relationship breakdown or because family or friends can no longer accommodate a homeless person, have remained largely unchanged over the past few years. However the reasons recorded in the statistics are the immediate causes of homelessness rather than a fuller account of what could be a more complicated picture.

¹ The most recent homelessness statistics, upon which this paper is based, are taken from the Scottish Executive's statistical bulletin, *Operation of the Homeless Persons Legislation in Scotland: National and Local Authority Analyses 2005-06*, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/09/25151544/> published in September 2006.

² Refer to: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/publications/2005/08/03155211/52281#453>

Applications assessed (Section 4)

Recent statistics indicate that the **proportion** of households applying as homeless who are **accepted** as homeless is falling. During the period 2005-06, the proportion of all households assessed as homeless varied considerably between different local authorities - from 41 per cent of applicants at the lowest, to 96 per cent at the other extreme. It seems unlikely that such variation can be explained by differences in people's circumstances. It is more likely that these variations are due, at least in part, to differences in practice between local authorities. These variations need to be explained.

Despite the greater number of single people applying as homeless, a smaller proportion of these applicants have been accepted as homeless in recent years. Such a decrease may mean this group is more vulnerable to any future impact of rationing.

Key issues (Sections 5 and 6)

Looking at the figures within the group of people assessed as homeless there are some issues of concern. Amongst those assessed, the biggest single group, **44 per cent** (25,699 households) were assessed as being in unintentionally homeless and in **priority need** and this proportion is growing. However, significant proportion, **13 per cent** (7,308 households) had **lost contact or withdrawn** their application before assessment and the number of cases categorised as lost contact or withdrawn has been rising since 2002-03.

Greater numbers of homeless people are being accepted as in priority need but it seems that we are still less likely to see young homeless people being awarded priority need despite legislative change.

Households accepted as homeless have a variety of outcomes. The majority of those assessed as in priority need in 2005-06 secured permanent (**70 per cent**) or temporary (**5 per cent**) accommodation; and **12 per cent** of non-priority homeless applications secured permanent accommodation while **8 per cent** secured temporary accommodation. At the end of March 2006, there were **8,135** households in temporary accommodation across Scotland. There were **4,869** dependent children living within these households.

The figures indicate that there has been a slight increase in the number of households making repeat applications. The vast majority of repeat applications are from **single-person households** (over **90 per cent** of repeat applications each year are made by this group). This trend needs to be monitored, as it may be an indication of inappropriate housing outcomes for this group; tenancy breakdown; or lack of success with prevention measures.

Since 2002-03 there had been a notable increase in the number of applicants who have been **accepted** as unintentionally homeless and in **priority need, who have lost contact**

with their local authority before their duty has been discharged. The most recent figures show a very slight decrease in the proportion but the actual numbers continue to grow. It will be important to see if the latest figures indicate a slowing down or a reversal in the trend as by definition these figures represent people in real housing need.

Securing accommodation after being accepted as homeless remains, arguably, one of the most challenging issues raised by the statistics. The statistics continue to indicate that the **use of temporary accommodation** is increasing. The number of families with children in temporary accommodation continues to grow and is not fully explained by the change in the data collected. Some of the increase in use of temporary accommodation is likely to be a result of local authorities implementing their new legal duties but this is unlikely to be the sole explanation. At least part of the increase is likely to be due to the pressure caused by a lack of permanent housing, creating a logjam where people are not able to move on from temporary accommodation into a permanent home.

Since the introduction of new regulations to limit the use of B&B accommodation for families, the statistics demonstrate that progress has been made. The numbers of families with children living in B&B accommodation has decreased. However the figures on breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order are variable, with numbers reducing to 32 breaches at 31 December 2005 but increasing again to 55 at 31 March 2006.

Shelter shares the Scottish Executive's concern that a relatively small proportion of non-priority homeless households are receiving accommodation even with their legal entitlement. Despite the fact that the 2001 Act requires local authorities to provide temporary accommodation for non-priority need households, only **20 per cent** of households assessed as non-priority, received accommodation in 2005-06. The Executive is currently looking at possible explanations for this, including inaccuracies in the collection of this information because a number of local authorities have indicated that the official statistics do not accurately reflect practice. Shelter awaits the outcome of this with interest.

There are still many challenges in trying to meet the radical homelessness agenda that aims to give everyone the right to a permanent home by 2012.

Introduction

The Scottish Executive provides annual statistics on homelessness in Scotland each year. With six years to go until 2012, (the date the government is committed to giving everyone in Scotland a right to a home) Shelter has taken the opportunity to analyse the most recent statistics³ and evaluate progress towards meeting the target.

The paper begins with an outline of the nature of homelessness and a brief introduction to the current legislative and policy context (*Section 1*). It then looks at homeless applications (*Section 2*); why people become homeless (*Section 3*); and what happens to them when they do (*Section 4*). The next part of the report (*Section 5*) considers some of the key issues raised by recent statistics on homelessness, in particular, the following issues are looked at in turn; rationing and gatekeeping (*page 12*); prevention (*page 13*); the impact of legal change (*page 15*); young homeless people (*page 16*); repeat applications (*page 16*); lost contacts (*page 17*); and securing accommodation (*page 19*). Conclusions are set out as *Section 6*.

Section 1 - What is homelessness?

When people think about homelessness they often think about people sleeping rough but homelessness is a much wider problem affecting tens of thousands of families and individuals each year. Homelessness is much more than being without a roof over your head - homelessness is being without a home. In other words, without somewhere warm, safe and secure; without somewhere you can welcome friends; receive post; or carry out many other aspects of daily life.

The Homelessness Task Force, in Scotland, established in 1999, provided a definition of what is meant by homelessness.

“...it extends to those who are living in insecure or intolerable accommodation simply because they have nowhere else to go, and to those who are threatened by homelessness even if they do not yet come within the statutory definition⁴.”

This marked a very progressive way to define homelessness within Scottish housing policy.

³ The most recent homelessness statistics, upon which this paper is based, are taken from the Scottish Executive's statistical bulletin, *Operation of the Homeless Persons Legislation in Scotland: National and Local Authority Analyses 2005-06*, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/09/25151544/> published in September 2006.

⁴ For full details of the Homelessness Task Force's definition of homelessness refer to *Appendix B* in its final report, *Helping Homeless People: An Action Plan for Prevention and Effective Responses*. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/housing/htff-00.asp>, Homelessness Task Force Final Report, 2002

Changes in homelessness legislation

In its first report, the Homelessness Task Force (HTF) focused on legislative proposals - almost all of which were incorporated into Part 1 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. There are two main sets of homelessness provisions within the Act:

To reform the role of local authorities:

- by placing a duty on each council to produce a homelessness strategy and to make advice and information available to everyone free of charge; and
- by establishing a single body to inspect councils and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) called Communities Scotland.

To increase the rights of homeless people:

- by giving everyone the right to temporary accommodation on application;
- by giving every non-priority applicant the right to temporary accommodation, advice and assistance; and
- by giving minimum rights to hostel dwellers.

Following the 2001 Act, the HTF undertook a more fundamental review of homelessness policy and law culminating in the publication of its second and final report published in February 2002. The report contained 59 recommendations to be put into action over a decade, to bring about a 'step change in the incidence of homelessness'. An important recommendation of the HTF was to radically reform the homelessness tests⁵ introduced in 1977. Five of the recommendations proposed legislative change, resulting in the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003.

The **2003 Act gives everyone in Scotland the right to a home by 2012**. In order to achieve this, the 2003 Act sets in motion a series of changes to homelessness law so that by 2012 everyone who is accepted as unintentionally homeless should have the right to a permanent home.

Reforming the homelessness tests

In practice, this means that one of the homelessness tests – the **priority need test** which divides homeless households into those eligible for a permanent home and those who are not – will be abolished by 2012. The first of the changes resulting from the 2003 Act

⁵ The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 established three main tests: the local authority must establish whether the applicant is 1. Homeless; 2. in priority need of accommodation and 3. intentionally homeless. If the applicant has successfully passed these tests, then an authority may address the issue of whether the applicant has a Local Connection with the authority to which s/he has applied for assistance.

(enacted in January 2004⁶) was to extend priority need status to a relatively small number of additional groups. The 2003 Act required the Scottish Executive to introduce a strategy for the extension and eventual abolition of the priority need test and the Executive gave a statement in the Scottish Parliament in December 2005 setting out the next steps for ending the priority need test⁷.

The 2003 Act also reforms two other homelessness tests – **the intentionality test** and **the local connection test**. When a local authority considers an applicant as homeless (i.e. they have passed the first of the homelessness tests, which establishes whether or not someone is homeless), they then have a duty to investigate whether that applicant is intentionally homeless.⁸ The 2003 Act makes two changes on intentionality: firstly, the duty to investigate will become a power, so that councils will be able to waive this test if they choose and secondly, it will give intentionally homeless people the right to a short tenancy with support. Both of these changes have yet to be enacted. The 2003 Act also gives the Executive the power to suspend the local connection test - meaning local authorities will no longer be able to refer a homeless applicant back to another authority in Scotland, (although they will still be able to do so if the applicant comes from elsewhere in the UK). The Scottish Executive formal consultation period on the changes to the local connection test ended in January 2007.

The 2003 Act also introduced powers for the Scottish Executive to limit the use of bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation for families with children. Since 6 December 2004 local authorities can only use B&B accommodation in specified circumstances.⁹

⁶ See <http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/policy/policy-2996.cfm#wiplive-17182-2>

⁷ For Shelter's initial observations on the Ministerial Statement on Homelessness in December 2005, refer to the following Shelter briefing; *Helping Homeless People*, <http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/policy/policy-421.cfm/ct/2/pg/2/plitem/199>

⁸ Intentionality is the third homelessness test. Before it can offer an applicant permanent accommodation, a council must check whether the applicant deliberately did something, or omitted to do something, that resulted in their becoming homeless.

⁹ In May 2005, Shelter produced practice guidelines aimed at helping local authorities eradicate the number of homeless families being placed in B&Bs: alternatives to bed and breakfast: an overview of practice in Scotland

Section 2 – Applications to be considered as homeless in Scotland

The Scottish Executive collects statistics on the number of people who apply to their local authority to be considered as homeless each year. This provides interesting contextual information that may give insights into people's knowledge and awareness of their rights. However some of the people applying will not will actually be 'assessed' or accepted as homeless or potentially homeless, under the law:

- Approximately **55,000 households** were **assessed** by their local authority in 2005-06 and **almost 40,000 (73 per cent) of these were defined as homeless**. The figures on applications should not be seen as the same as the number of people who are homeless in Scotland.

When considering the nature and scale of homelessness in Scotland in subsequent sections of the report, the statistics on households assessed as homeless are used and are considered to be the key indicators but this section of the report looks initially at the figures provided on applications:

- In 2005-6, **56,811** individual households applied to their local authority under the Homeless Persons legislation.
- Households applying also contained **29,124 children** and **18,568 of the main applicants** in households applying **were aged between 16 and 24 years old**.

The remaining households were not considered to be homeless by the council (although this remaining 27 per cent includes those who also lost contact with the council; withdrew their application; or had it resolved before any assessment) thus the local authority has no duty to provide them with housing.

People who are homeless may have a roof over their heads but they are often living in inadequate 'temporary' housing that may damage their health and wellbeing. For example, they may have to live in places like temporary hostels, B&B hotels, or share insecure and overcrowded conditions with other families.

Hidden homelessness

The Scottish Executive's statistics do not necessarily provide a complete picture of homelessness in Scotland. There are many other people described as '**hidden homeless**', who have not approached their council for help and are therefore not recorded in official statistics. This includes people who are sleeping temporarily on the floors and couches of friends or relatives and people living in out-of-season holiday lets or

poor quality caravans. The latest information from the Scottish Household Survey revealed that only 64 per cent of households who had experienced homelessness had approached their local authority for assistance.¹⁰ A significant number of households who have experienced homelessness still do not approach their local authority for assistance. A recent report from the Homelessness Monitoring Group acknowledges this situation and aims to make existing homelessness more visible¹¹.

It is more difficult to determine the characteristics of 'hidden homeless' people. Previous research has shown that people from ethnic minorities, women and single people tend to be more likely to be classified as 'hidden homeless'¹². People who live in rural areas are generally acknowledged to be less likely to apply as homeless to their local council thus hidden homelessness can be more of a problem in rural areas.

Ethnicity and deprivation category

This year, for the first time, the bulletin gives information on applicants' ethnicity and deprivation category¹³. The table uses percentages based on household data from the 2001 Census on ethnic groups and the 2004 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation¹⁴. The bulletin reports that a higher proportion of all Black, Black Scottish or Black British people (9 per cent), applied than the proportion of applicants within any other ethnic group - although this group only accounts for 0.5 per cent of all applicants. The table also looks at social deprivation categories and reports that 24 per cent of all applicants come from the most deprived areas. This may be an issue for concern as it suggests a significant link between social deprivation and homelessness.

¹⁰ Refer to: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/publications/2005/08/03155211/52281#453>

¹¹ *Helping Homeless People: Delivering the Action Plan for Prevention and Effective Responses*, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/04/19133815/0>, Homelessness Monitoring Group Third Report – April 2006, published by the Scottish Executive.

¹² *Black and Minority Ethnic Communities and Homelessness in Scotland* <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/07/19610/39941>

¹³ From the Scottish Executive's statistical bulletin, *Operation of the Homeless Persons Legislation in Scotland: National and Local Authority Analyses 2005-06*, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/09/25151544/> page 21.

¹⁴ Percentages are based on household data from the 2001 Census on the ethnic group of the household reference person and number of households in each postcode sector. Based on postcode of last settled accommodation (if in Scotland). This is recorded for about 60 per cent of cases (see notes and definitions).

Based on the 2004 *Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation*. Information on the SIMD can be found on the Scottish Executive website at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/06/19421/38085>

Section 3 - Why do people become homeless?

Homelessness affects people in a wide range of circumstances. Homeless families or individuals seldom cause their own homelessness situation. Rather, homelessness tends to occur because people can no longer continue to live in a particular place or there has been a relationship breakdown. In 2005-06, the main reasons recorded were:

- **Loss of accommodation** with family or friends (36 per cent)
- **Dispute within the household** (23 per cent), many of which may be related to domestic abuse.
- **Taken together, other significant reasons** include: loss of tenancy, eviction, or the inability to pay rent or mortgage.

The major causes of homelessness, such as relationship breakdown or because family or friends can no longer accommodate a homeless person, have remained largely unchanged over the past few years. These are areas where it can be difficult to intervene and help prevent homelessness, especially in the short-term.

Although the numbers are smaller, prison leavers continue to feature as a group who are particularly vulnerable to homelessness. In addition, loss of accommodation in the private sector or from a hostel, hotel or lodgings also features as a reason for homelessness. In 2005-06:

- **Discharge from hospital/prison** accounted for 6 per cent (3,436) of homeless applications
- **Loss of private sector tenancy** accounted for 8 per cent (4,373) of homeless applications
- **Loss of accommodation** in hostel/lodgings/hotel accounted for 2 per cent (1,054) of homeless applications

These three reasons for making a homeless application may be modest in terms of their impact on the total number of homelessness applications but initiatives to prevent homelessness¹⁵ may tackle these causes more easily than some of the others. The prevention of homelessness will be discussed further in *Section 5* of the report.

Scottish Executive statistics may not fully represent the reasons why households become homeless. The reasons recorded in the statistics are the immediate causes of homelessness rather than a fuller account of what could be a more complicated picture.

¹⁵ For a more detailed discussion of prevention work refer to *Homeless prevention in Scotland* by Shelter Scotland, <http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/policy/policy-421.cfm/ct/2/pg/1/plitem/205>, by Shelter Scotland, April 2006.

For example, a family may have fallen into rent or mortgage arrears and moved in with another family as an emergency measure yet it may only be the latter reason that is recorded in the statistics.

Section 4 - What happens to people who are homeless?

Applications that were assessed under homelessness legislation in 2005-06 were categorised as follows:

- 44 per cent (25,699 households) were assessed as unintentionally homeless and in priority need
- 2 per cent (995 households) were assessed as intentionally homeless in priority need
- 15 per cent (8,929 households) were assessed as non-priority homeless
- 13 per cent (7,308 households) had lost contact or withdrawn their application before assessment
- 10 per cent were assessed as potentially homeless
- the remaining applications were assessed as not homeless (9 per cent) or had been resolved prior to assessment (7 per cent)

The **proportion** of cases categorised as lost contact or withdrawn has been rising steadily from 9 per cent in 2002-03 to 13 per cent in 2005/6 and there was an increase of 5.5 per cent in the **number** of such cases between 2004/5 and 2005/6.

Households accepted as homeless are placed in a variety of accommodation (depending upon their rights under housing and homelessness law) from temporary accommodation such as hostels or B&B hotels, to being offered accommodation permanently.

- In 2005-06, **70 per cent** of applications assessed as **homeless in priority need** secured permanent accommodation and **5 per cent** secured temporary accommodation.
- In 2005-06, **12 per cent** of applications assessed as **homeless, non-priority** secured permanent accommodation and **8 per cent** secured temporary accommodation¹⁶.
- At the end of March 2006, there were **8,135** households in temporary accommodation across Scotland. There were **4,869** dependent children living within these households.

¹⁶ As will be highlighted in the subsection on getting a house in the second half of the paper, the Scottish Executive is concerned that such a relatively small proportion of non-priority homeless households are receiving accommodation despite their legal entitlement. The Executive is looking at possible explanations for this, including inaccuracies in the collection of these data.

Section 5 - Key issues arising from 2005 statistics

The paper now discusses some of the key issues arising from recent homelessness statistics:

Rationing

There is likely to be an element of 'rationing' in any system that has to allocate limited resources and to date the different categories for assessment of applicants have been used to assist this process.

The existing ways in which access to housing is restricted or 'rationed' are gradually being eroded as the 2003 Act is implemented. The fact that homeless households will no longer have to be assigned a priority or non-priority category is one of the key mechanisms for achieving the goal that everyone who is homeless will have the right to a home by 2012. There will probably be greater focus on the initial assessment of 'are you homeless' in future as a consequence.

Gatekeeping and prevention

It is important to recognise that changing numbers of homelessness applications alone will not provide a useful indication of how much homelessness is increasing or decreasing within Scotland. According to the statistics, the rate of growth in homeless applications appeared to be slowing between 2003-04 and 2004-05 (down from 9 per cent to 2 per cent). However the rate has increased again in 2005-06 (4 per cent) (see *Chart 1* below) although not to the previous high. When examining the impacts of legislative change in Scotland, the relative impacts on applications of both gatekeeping and prevention work must be considered¹⁷.

Gatekeeping is the term used to describe what happens when local authority staff dissuade someone from making a homeless application at all. This may be for example, by informing them of shortages in permanent and temporary accommodation. Thus a potentially homeless person is put off applying as they believe there is no point as they will not be re-housed.¹⁸ As a result, numbers of homelessness applications may decrease but not because of a genuine decrease in homelessness.

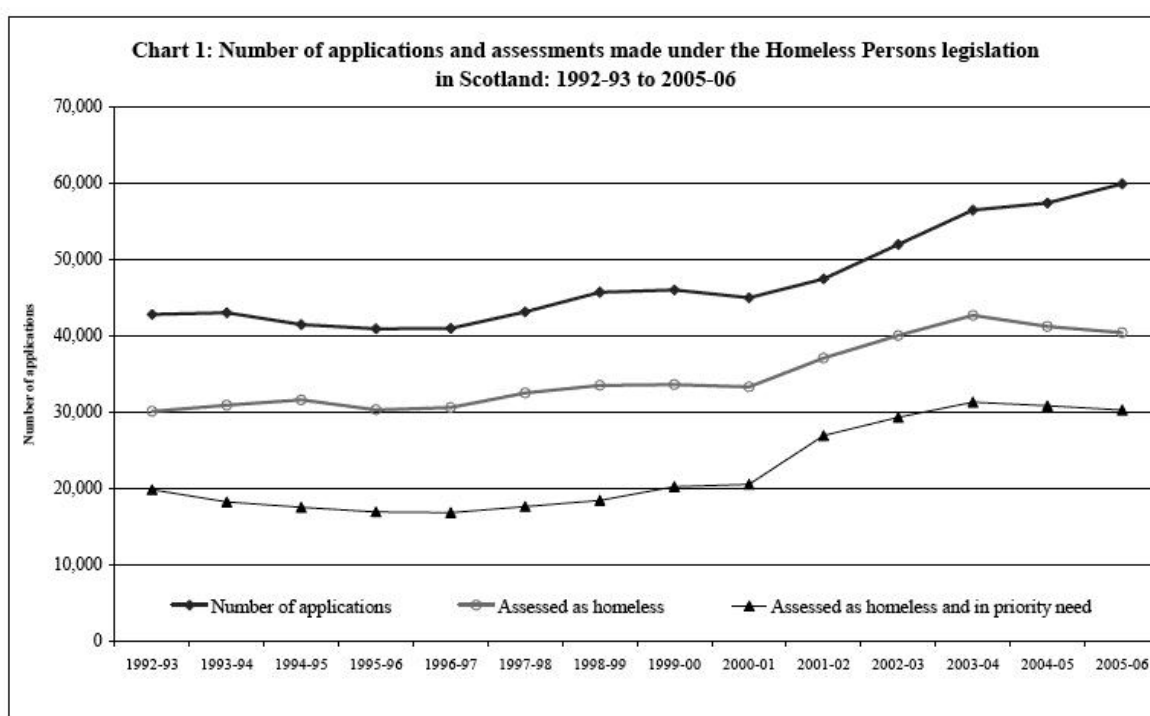
¹⁷ For a more detailed discussion of prevention work refer to Homeless prevention in Scotland, <http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/policy/policy-421.cfm/ct/2/pg/1/plitem/205> by Shelter Scotland, April 2006.

¹⁸ Evidence of gatekeeping practices was found by Communities Scotland Regulations and Inspections Teams in four of the first five local authority homelessness services to be inspected For further information see: Communities Scotland (2005) *Key themes from inspections – homelessness*, http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/cs_009118.pdf

Prevention of homelessness describes a wide range of interventions and activities¹⁹. Levels of homelessness applications may fall as a result of genuine reduction in homelessness due to the positive impact of prevention work.

Recent research suggests that, for example, during the assessment of homelessness, some people applying as homeless may be discouraged or recorded as 'not homeless' to limit the number of households who are given housing.²⁰ This type of activity needs to be monitored carefully in future.

The statistics demonstrate that over the past ten years there has been an increase in the number of households **applying** under homelessness legislation, as well as an increase in the number of households **being assessed** as homeless (see *Chart 1* below²¹).



However recent statistics indicate that the proportion of households applying as homeless who are accepted as homeless fell in 2004-05 and remained at that level in 2005-06.

¹⁹ For example, prevention work could include measures that increase the amount of affordable housing available, as well as support aimed at individuals who may be at risk of homelessness due to specific issues such as financial or personal difficulties.

²⁰ *More priority needed - youth homelessness and legislative change*, <http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/policy/policy-421.cfm/plitem/194>

²¹ From the Scottish Executive's statistical bulletin, *Operation of the Homeless Persons .Legislation in Scotland: National and Local Authority Analyses 2005-06*, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/09/25151544/> page 2.

Table 1 below shows the number and proportion of households accepted as homeless since 2002-03:

Table 1 - Proportion of all applicants accepted as homeless since 2002-03

Period	Proportion Accepted As Homeless	
	Percentage	Number
2002-03	78%	34,310
2003-04	77%	36,066
2004-05	73%	38,609
2005-06	73%	39,923

So although more households are applying, a smaller proportion is being accepted. During the period 2005-06, the proportion of all households assessed as homeless varied considerably between different local authorities from 41 per cent of applicants at the lowest to 96 per cent at the other extreme. It seems unlikely that such variation can be explained by differences in people's circumstances. It is more likely that these variations are due, at least in part, to differences in practice between local authorities.

The assessment decision also varied according to household type. Between 2001-2 and 2003-04, the **number** of single person households assessed as homeless increased gradually until 2004-5, when it decreased slightly from previous years. The **proportion** of single person households being assessed as homeless has decreased from 81 per cent in 2001-02 to 72 per cent in 2004-05. This downward trend continues in 2005-06 with only 69 per cent of single applicants being assessed as homeless. Despite the greater number of single people applying as homeless, a smaller proportion of these applicants have been accepted as homeless in recent years. This trend needs further investigation. It could be due to more people applying as homeless even although they do not qualify under the legislation or it might be evidence of some form of gatekeeping practice where genuinely homeless single people are being excluded and thus a cause for concern.

The proportion of households being accepted as homeless requires careful monitoring at a national level. The substantial variations across local authority areas need to be explained. In particular, a notable decrease in the proportion of single person households being assessed as homeless may mean this group is more vulnerable to any future impact of rationing.

Impact of legal change

The first set of changes to the categories of priority need introduced by the 2003 Act came into effect from 30 January 2004. Between 2000-01, and 2004-05 an increasing proportion of households across Scotland who were **accepted** as homeless by local authorities²² had been assessed as in priority need. The level remained constant in the last year:

Table 2 below illustrates the proportion of homeless households accepted as homeless and assessed as being in priority need:

Table 2 - Assessed as homeless and in priority need

Period	Homeless assessed as in priority need
2000-01	62%
2001-02	73%
2002-03	73%
2003-04	73%
2004-05	75%
2005-06	75%

However the proportion of all households accepted as homeless assessed as being in priority need continues to vary greatly between local authorities from 51 per cent at the lowest to 89 per cent at the highest.

In 2001-02 there was a substantial increase in the proportion of **single-person households** assessed as in priority need from 47 per cent the previous year to 62 per cent. Since then the proportion has been fairly static at 64 per cent in 2004-05. Consideration of the increase in priority need decisions for single-person households on its own is insufficient, if there is a downward trend in the number of single homeless people being accepted as homeless in the first place. We need to be certain that this is not evidence of gatekeeping in the system.

²² That is 73 per cent of all applicants assessed by local authorities referred to earlier in the section entitled - What happens to people who are homeless?

Young homeless people

Shelter has paid particular attention to the situation for young homeless people since the changes to priority need²³. Young homeless people now have priority need status if they are: 16-17 years old; care leavers up to age 20; and/or considered vulnerable²⁴. The current statistics demonstrate:

- the **total number** (4,226) of main applicants aged under 18 years old has decreased slightly in the last year (**4 per cent**)
- A **decrease (5.5 per cent)** from 2,578 to 2,435 in the **number** of under 18 year old single people assessed as **in priority need** from the previous year. The trend had been one of relatively steady increase until 2003-04
- the **proportion** of all applicants assessed as **in priority need** aged under 18 years **decreased** steadily since 1999 and has remained at 8 per cent for the last three years
- although the numbers are very small, there has been an **increase (from 16 to 22) in the number of under 18 year olds assessed as in non-priority need** in 2005-06 compared to 2003-04. This is in contrast to a previous downward trend since 1997-98.

The figures present a complex picture. Greater numbers of homeless people are being accepted as in priority need but it seems that we are still less likely to see young homeless people being awarded priority need despite legislative change. It is difficult to reconcile some of the statistics with the increased duty towards this group. As well as the impact of positive work that helps prevent homelessness amongst young people, we must remain alert to any practices that may hinder young people from making a complete application or giving full information.

Repeat applications

The following figures indicate that there had been a small but steady increase in the number of households making repeat applications between 2002 and 2005 but this increase was halted and even decreased very slightly in 2005-06. *Table 3* illustrates the proportion and number of households applying as homeless more than once to their local authority:

²³ The following report sets out the findings of a study of the impact of recent legislative change on young homeless people's access to housing and support. The research was conducted in Scotland and England between February and May 2005: *More priority needed - youth homelessness and legislative change*, <http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/policy/policy-421.cfm/plitem/194>

²⁴ For more detail refer to the Code of Guidance on Homelessness, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/53814/0012265.pdf>

Table 3 - Households applying as homeless more than once

Period	Applications	
	Percentage	Number
2002-03	6%	3,100
2003-04	8%	4,326
2004-05	9%	4,933
2005-06	8.5%	4,829

The vast majority of repeat applications are from **single-person households** (79 per cent of repeat applications each year are made by this group). However female single parents made up 14 per cent of repeat applications in both of the two most recent years. This trend needs to be monitored, as it may be an indication of inappropriate housing outcomes for this group; tenancy breakdown; or lack of success with prevention measures.

Lost contact or withdrew application

There has also been a slight increase from the previous year in the number of households who either **lost contact with the local authority or withdrew their application before** any assessment process was completed. This is set out in *Table 4* below:

Table 4 - Applications where contact lost or withdrawn prior to assessment decision

Period	Lost contact/applications withdrawn	
	Percentage	Number
2002-03	9%	4,477
2003-04	10%	5,357
2004-05	12%	6,926
2005-06	13%	7,308

Single male households continue to account for the greatest proportion (**47 per cent**) of those households who either lost contact or withdrew their application *before* any assessment process was completed.

The proportion of cases where contact is lost between initial application and discharge of duty varies between 45 per cent in one authority and only 1 per cent at the other extreme. Recent anecdotal evidence suggests that some authorities have been successfully adopting measures to address the high numbers of such cases through prevention initiatives. This might account, to some extent, for the significant variations between authorities in maintaining contact with homeless households.

Table 5 illustrates the numbers of applications that have been accepted as **unintentionally homeless and in priority need, who have lost contact** with their local authority before their duty has been discharged. There was a notable increase between the 2003-04 and 2004-05 figures but the most recent figures show a very slight decrease in the proportion of lost contacts even although the actual numbers have continued to grow.

Table 5 - Unintentionally homeless in priority need and lost contact prior to discharge of duty

Period	Priority unintentional homeless Lost contact before duty discharged	
	Percentage	Number
2002-03	16%	3,490
2003-04	15%	3,561
2004-05	21%	5,585
2005-06	20%	5,658

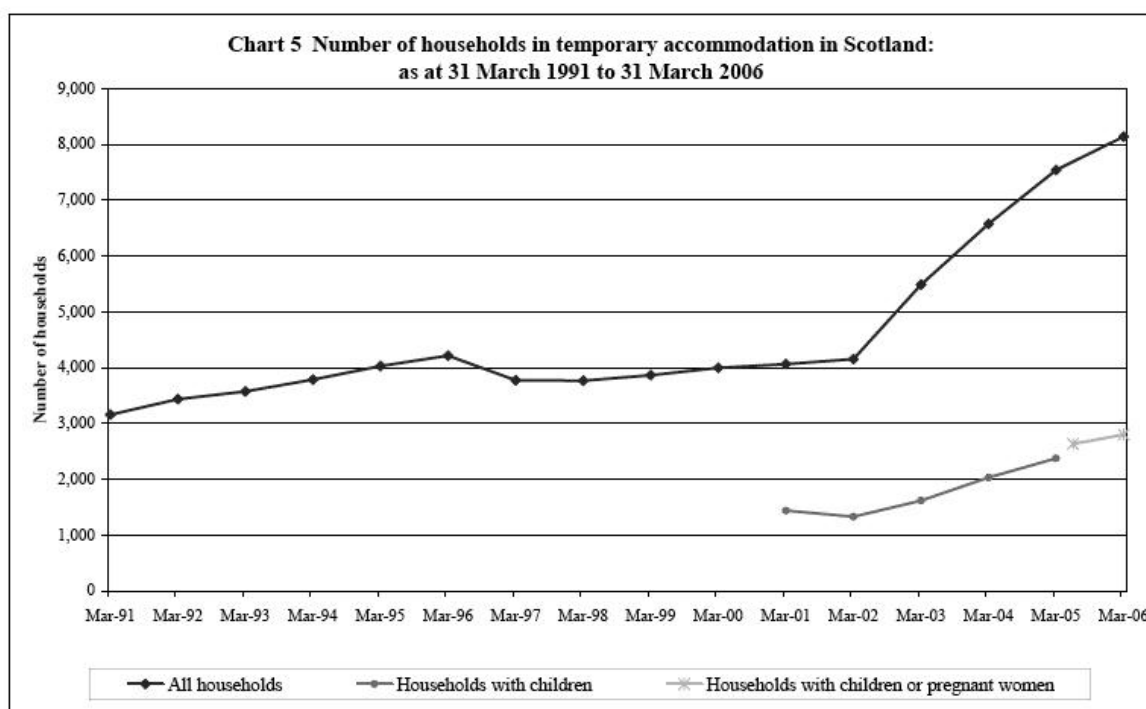
Single person households in this category seem to be increasingly likely to lose contact with the local authority. The number of **homeless single person households in priority need** that have lost contact **increased by 48 per cent** between 2002-03 and 2004-05, the figures for 2005-06 show a stabilising of this trend with a very slight decrease of 0.5 per cent. The number of **homeless single parent households in priority need** who have

lost contact **increased by 68 per cent** between 2002-03 and 2003-04 and by a further 11 per cent by 2005-06.

It is possible that people are being filtered out of the system by gatekeeping. Alternatively it may be that people applying as homeless have increasingly complex problems and it is more difficult to keep them within the system - especially since the current system tends not to be very accessible for people with multiple and complicated needs. Both of these possible explanations suggest that changes in practice might reduce the numbers of people who are leaving the system before the local authority has discharged its duty.

Getting a house

Securing accommodation after being accepted as homeless arguably remains one of the most challenging issues raised by the statistics. The statistics continue to indicate that the **use of temporary accommodation** is increasing (see *Chart 5* below²⁵).



²⁵ *Chart 5* is taken from Scottish Executive's *Statistics Release*, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/09/25151544/> published in September 2006, p8. Note that figures for households with children or pregnant women are not strictly comparable prior to June 2005, as previous figures did not include households with pregnant women and no children.

The number of households in temporary accommodation across Scotland increased only gradually throughout the 1990s but there has been a marked increase from 2002:

- Between March 2002 and March 2006, the number of households in temporary accommodation **increased by 95 per cent**.
- The number of households living in **temporary accommodation with dependent children increased by 110 per cent** between March 2002 and March 2006.

The Executives Statistical bulletin notes that from June 2005 the figures include households with pregnant women so they are not strictly comparable. However the figure for March 2005 (i.e. before the inclusion of pregnant women) shows an increase of 79 per cent suggesting that the inclusion of households with pregnant women is unlikely to be the key factor behind the increases.

Some of the increase in use of temporary accommodation is likely to be a result of local authorities implemented their new legal duties however this is unlikely to explain the magnitude of increase in use. At least part of the increase is likely to be due to the pressure faced by local authorities caused by a lack of permanent housing, creating a logjam in people being able to move on from temporary accommodation into a permanent home.

Bed and breakfast hotels are still being used as temporary accommodation for people who are homeless. Shelter has been particularly concerned about the use of this type of accommodation because it is often poor quality and the most expensive form of accommodation used by local authorities²⁶.

- At 31st March 2006, there were **1,548** households living in B&B accommodation. Although this is an **increase of 172 per cent** on the figure for 31 March 2002, the number of households being placed in B&B accommodation on 31 March 2006 had fallen very slightly (0.5 per cent) on the 31 March 2005 figure.

B&B accommodation can only be used in certain circumstances for households with dependent children²⁷. Since the introduction of new regulations to limit the use of B&B accommodation for families, the statistics demonstrate that progress has been made.

²⁶ In May 2005, Shelter produced practice guidelines aimed at helping local authorities eradicate the number of homeless families being placed in B&Bs: *Alternatives to bed and breakfast: an overview of practice in Scotland*, <http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/policy/policy-421.cfm/ct/2/ty/2/pg/3/plitem/172>

²⁷ The Unsuitable Accommodation (Scotland) (Order) 2004 came into effect in December 2004. It requires that no families with children should be housed in 'unsuitable' accommodation and if it is provided under 'specific circumstances', then the maximum amount of time that a family can stay in the unsuitable accommodation is 14 days (unless the family consents to a longer period).

- The numbers of **families with children living in B&B accommodation** has **decreased by 20 per cent** between 31 March 2005 (167 households) and 31 March 2006 (134 households)²⁸.

However the figures on breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order are variable, with numbers reducing to 32 breaches at 31 December 2005 and increasing again to 55 at 31 March 2006.

Permanent accommodation

The numbers of **households being offered permanent accommodation is increasing**. *Table 6* below compares the latest percentage changes in the offers of temporary and permanent accommodation to priority and non-priority homeless households:

Table 6 - Percentage changes in offers of temporary and permanent accommodation

Period	Priority homeless		Non-priority homeless	
	Accommodation offered (as a percentage of applications assessed as priority need)		Accommodation offered (as a percentage of applications assessed as non-priority)	
	Permanent	Temporary	Permanent	Temporary
2002-03	57%	24%	8%	26%
2003-04	56%	15%	12%	16%
2004-05	69%	4%	13%	8%
2005-06	70%	5%	12%	8%

The above table represents the national picture. There is substantial variation between local authorities ranging from 45 per cent through to 87 per cent of all priority homeless households being offered permanent accommodation in 2005-06.

However, only 20 per cent (a very slight decrease from 21 per cent in 2004-05) of households assessed as non-priority, received accommodation in 2005-06. This is despite the fact that the 2001 Act requires local authorities to provide temporary accommodation for non-priority need households. The Scottish Executive is concerned that a relatively

²⁸ From June 2005, the category of households with children or pregnant women was introduced to monitor the implementation of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order. The statistics included this new category from that point and so are not strictly comparable with previous ones.

small proportion of non-priority homeless households are receiving accommodation despite their legal entitlement. It is currently looking at possible explanations for this, including inaccuracies in the collection of this information, because a number of local authorities have indicated that the official statistics do not accurately reflect practice.

Section 6 - Conclusions

The paper has provided an analysis of the homelessness statistics in Scotland for 2005-06. It gave a brief explanation of what homelessness is; who it affects and why; and what happens to people when they become homeless. It also set out an overview of recent legislative and policy changes affecting homeless people.

Scotland has been widely credited with having the most progressive homelessness legislation in Western Europe. There have been many significant changes that have been brought into effect in Scotland that should help tackle the problem of homelessness as well as help people who become homeless.

For the time being however there are still many challenges in trying to meet the radical homelessness agenda that aims to give everyone the right to a permanent home by 2012. The number of people applying as homeless continues to rise, as does the number of individual homeless households and families being placed in temporary accommodation.

With this in mind, *Section 5* highlighted some key issues from the 2005-06 statistics. In summary:

- The main reasons given for applying as homeless in recent years, that is, relationship breakdown or because family or friends can no longer accommodate a homeless person, have remained largely unchanged.
- The proportion of cases where contact is lost or withdrawn prior to assessment continues to grow.
- The proportion of households being accepted as homeless is falling. This will require careful monitoring, at a national level, to assess whether it is due to a greater proportion of non-entitled people applying or due to some form of gatekeeping within the system. The substantial variations across local authority areas need to be explained. A notable decrease in the proportion of single person households being assessed as homeless may mean this group is more vulnerable to any future impact of rationing.
- **Legal change:** the proportion of households assessed in priority need is rising but despite legislative change, we are still less likely to see young people awarded priority need status.

- **Gatekeeping and prevention:** there has been a slight increase in the number of repeat applications under homelessness legislation and an increasing number of households are either losing contact with the local authority or withdrawing their application before any assessment has been completed. The latter is increasingly a problem for priority single person households. This raises the question as to whether it is an impact of gatekeeping or whether there may be an increasing number of people with complex needs applying as homeless.
- There is a slight increase from last year in the level of cases where contact is lost before assessment is completed. However there are big variations between the different local authorities and there is anecdotal evidence that some authorities may be making significant impacts on the problem through good practice. The issues associated with lost contacts prior to discharge need further investigation, in particular the relatively high proportion of priority homeless single person and single parent households where contact has been lost.
- A relatively steady proportion of households continue to make repeat applications. The vast majority of repeat applications are from single-person households but single parents have accounted for a small but significant proportion of repeat applications in both of the two most recent years. This trend needs to be monitored, as it may be an indication of inappropriate housing outcomes for this group; tenancy breakdown; or lack of success with prevention measures.
- The proportion of all households accepted as homeless and assessed as being in priority need increased steadily until 2004-05 and has remained constant in the last year. However the proportion accepted continues to vary greatly between local authorities from 51 per cent at the lowest to 89 per cent at the highest.
- It is possible that people are being filtered out of the system by gatekeeping and some of the research, particularly on young people and homelessness, suggests that there is evidence of this happening. Alternatively it may be that people applying as homeless have increasingly complex problems and it is more difficult to keep them within the system. Both of these possible explanations suggest that changes in practice might reduce the numbers of people who are leaving the system before the local authority has discharged its duty. The relatively high proportions of single people and single parents who lose contact after they are assessed, but before duty is discharged, point to possible failures in the system.
- **Getting a house:** securing accommodation remains a great challenge as the use of temporary accommodation rises. The number of households being offered permanent accommodation has increased but there is substantial variation between local authorities on the proportion of homeless households in priority need being offered permanent accommodation. Despite a universal entitlement, many non-priority households are not being given accommodation. The reasons behind this trend need to be explored.

- There has been a marked increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation across Scotland since 2002. The number of families with children in temporary accommodation continues to grow and is not fully explained by the change in the data collected. Some of the increase in use of temporary accommodation is likely to be a result of local authorities implementing their new legal duties however this is unlikely to explain the magnitude of increase in use. At least part of the increase is likely to be due to the pressure faced by local authorities caused by a lack of permanent housing, creating a logjam in people being able to move on from temporary accommodation into a permanent home.
- Since the introduction of new regulations to limit the use of B&B accommodation for families, the statistics demonstrate that progress has been made. The numbers of families with children living in B&B accommodation has decreased. However the figures on breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order are variable, with numbers reducing to 32 breaches at 31 December 2005 and increasing again to 55 at March 2006.
- Despite the fact that the 2001 Act requires local authorities to provide temporary accommodation for non-priority need households, only 20 per cent of households assessed as non-priority, received accommodation in 2005-06. Shelter shares the Scottish Executive's concern that a relatively small proportion of non-priority homeless households are receiving accommodation despite their legal entitlement. The Executive is currently looking at possible explanations for this, including inaccuracies in the collection of this information because a number of local authorities have indicated that the official statistics do not accurately reflect practice. Shelter awaits the outcome of this with interest.