

# The use of temporary accommodation in Scotland

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## Key Points

- In 2014-15 local authorities provided an estimated 3.8 million days of temporary accommodation for homeless households, of which just under 1 million were for households with children.
- 61% of all homeless households spend time in temporary accommodation while the local authority resolves their homeless application.
- On average, households using temporary accommodation stayed there for 23 weeks. However, a third of households spend over 6 months there, and 1 in 10 spend over a year in temporary accommodation.
- More households without children have very short stays, under 2 weeks, in TA.
- Half of all households with children spent over 17 weeks in TA, which was higher than the median for households without children, at 13 weeks.
- The types of temporary accommodation used varies dramatically across local authorities: in four local authorities, hostels and bed and breakfast hotels made up over 50% of temporary accommodation provision.

## Recommendations

- Shelter Scotland ask that the Scottish Government officially develop and endorse non-statutory guidance on standards in temporary accommodation to ensure that stays in temporary accommodation are a positive stepping stone.
- Scotland needs to build 12,000 new affordable homes each year over the next five years to help reduce long stays in temporary accommodation.
- There must be renewed effort to reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation, particularly for vulnerable single households

## Introduction

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

- Local authorities must provide TA to all homeless applicants whilst their applications are being assessed.
- All unintentionally homeless households are entitled to TA until permanent accommodation is found.
- Households assessed as intentionally homeless are entitled to TA for a reasonable period whilst the applicant is given information and assistance to secure alternative accommodation themselves.

There are also requirements set in legislation around standards of TA provision. The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004 requires local authorities to ensure that homeless households with children, and pregnant women, are not placed in unsuitable TA (which includes bed and breakfast accommodation) unless under exceptional circumstances. In 2011, Shelter Scotland and the Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland jointly issued guidance on physical standards of TA as well as good practice in terms of location, service and management.<sup>1</sup> Shelter Scotland have continued to campaign for the Scottish Government to bring stakeholders together to develop common guidance for TA and then to officially endorse this guidance.<sup>2</sup> In 2014, an amendment was made to the 2004 Order,<sup>3</sup> expanding the definition of 'unsuitable accommodation' to include that it must be wind and watertight.

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

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<sup>1</sup> Shelter Scotland and CIH Scotland, Temporary accommodation guidance, January 2011

[http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional\\_resources/policy\\_library/policy\\_library\\_folder/temporary\\_accommodation\\_guidance](http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/temporary_accommodation_guidance)

<sup>2</sup> Shelter Scotland, Temporary accommodation standards: campaign briefing, November 2013

[http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional\\_resources/policy\\_library/policy\\_library\\_folder/temporary\\_accommodation\\_standards\\_campaign\\_briefing](http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/temporary_accommodation_standards_campaign_briefing)

<sup>3</sup> The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2014 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2014/243/made>

<sup>4</sup> Audit Scotland (2013) *Housing in Scotland* [http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2013/nr\\_130711\\_housing\\_overview.pdf](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2013/nr_130711_housing_overview.pdf)

when there is great pressure on local authority finances and the funding and management subsidy for TA is being reduced with the introduction of Universal Credit.<sup>5</sup>

Being in TA can be disruptive, especially for the 4,896 children who live there<sup>6</sup> and long periods in TA can impact on a child's physical and mental health and their educational attainment.<sup>7</sup> Households in TA can feel disconnected from the wider community and do not benefit from the security of having a settled home, which is foundational for many areas of wellbeing<sup>8</sup>.

It is important, therefore, to understand how long households are actually spending in TA. However, the statistics currently available on TA use are very restricted. In response to the limitations of existing datasets, in August 2014 Shelter Scotland made a freedom of information (FOI) request to all 32 local authorities to address the gaps in identifying length of stay in TA and the different experiences of households with and without children. We published our findings in January 2015.<sup>9</sup> In August 2015, in an attempt to capture some trend data as well as capitalize on recently improved data collection amongst local authorities,<sup>10</sup> we repeated this exercise. We received data from 27 local authorities, (up from 23 last year) with varying levels of completeness. Although not all local authorities were able to provide full responses, the information submitted covered 87% (or 30,273 cases) of all cases closed in Scotland in 2014-15 – up from 73% in 2013-14.

This report draws on this freedom of information request, existing statistics and performance information from the Scottish Housing Regulator [see appendix]. Taken together these provide a better, albeit still limited, understanding of the experiences of homeless households using TA, covering the following questions:

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<sup>5</sup> DWP, Housing Benefits Circular: HB A9/2014, Temporary accommodation in Housing Benefit and Universal Credit, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/housing-benefit-for-local-authorities-circulars-2014>

<sup>6</sup> Scottish Government, Quarterly Temporary Accommodation Reference Tables April – June 2015 <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/RefTables/homelessApriltoJune2015>

<sup>7</sup> Shelter Scotland, Temporary accommodation standards: campaign briefing, November 2013 [http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional\\_resources/policy\\_library/policy\\_library\\_folder/temporary\\_accommodation\\_standards\\_campaign\\_briefing](http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/temporary_accommodation_standards_campaign_briefing)

<sup>8</sup> Commission on Housing and Wellbeing (2015) A Blueprint for Scotland's Future <http://housingandwellbeing.org/>

<sup>9</sup> Shelter Scotland, The use of temporary accommodation in Scotland, 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)

<sup>10</sup> In 2015 the decision was taken by the Scottish Government to make the return of a statistical dataset focusing on temporary accommodation provision by local authorities mandatory, resulting in more local authorities moving towards improved collection and reporting of temporary accommodation data.

1. How much is TA used?
2. How long do people stay in TA?
3. What type of TA do households stay in?
4. What types of TA were offered and refused, and what were the satisfaction levels with TA occupied?

Unless otherwise specified, all statistics used are from the data submitted in response to our FOI request.

## 1. How much is temporary accommodation used?

- During 2014-15 there was an average of 10,302 households in Scotland in TA on any one night, of whom 2,578 (25%) were households with children.<sup>11</sup> The average number of children in TA on any given night was 4,373.<sup>12</sup>
- In total, in 2014-15 local authorities provided an estimated 3.8 million days of TA for homeless households of which just under 1 million were for households with children.<sup>13</sup>
- 61% of all households, an estimated 21,200 households, whose cases closed in 2014-15 occupied TA arranged by the local authority at some point during their homelessness assessment.<sup>14</sup> This pattern was the same for households with children, and for those without.

## 2. How long do people spend in temporary accommodation?

- Shelter Scotland estimates from the existing published data that the average (mean) time spent in TA for all households who spent time there and whose case closed in 2014-15 was 23 weeks.<sup>15</sup> This was longer than in 2013-14 where the figure was 126 days (18 weeks).<sup>16</sup> This increase is likely to be because of an improvement in available data quality, rather than any significant change in the length of time people spend in TA, which should also be borne in mind when looking at comparison data provided in brackets in the list below. Evidence from our FOI request helps break this down further:<sup>17</sup>
- 13% (1 in 5) of households spent less than 2 weeks in TA (20% in 2013- 14).
- 27% (2 in 5) spent less than 7 weeks in TA.

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<sup>11</sup> Source: Scottish Government quarterly accommodation reference tables

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

<sup>12</sup> This figure was calculated using an average of the 2014-15 quarterly temporary accommodation snapshot figures, Source: Scottish Government quarterly accommodation reference tables <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/RefTables>

<sup>13</sup> Source: Estimated from Scottish Government quarterly accommodation reference tables. The total number of temporary accommodation days provided in the ARC was 3.4 million days.

<sup>14</sup> Based on responses from 27 local authorities.

<sup>15</sup> We used the 'total households using TA' figure from the FOI as a base for this calculation. As such, to calculate the mean we used the ARC data for only the local authorities who could respond to this initial figure (26 local authorities). This provides a mean for these local authorities which, given the coverage, can be assumed to be correct for across Scotland.

<sup>16</sup> Shelter Scotland, The use of temporary accommodation in Scotland, 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)

<sup>17</sup> NB: These statistics only correspond to households whose cases were closed in 2014-15, therefore it does not cover applicants who have been in temporary accommodation for a long period and whose case is still open.

- 50% of households spent more than 15 weeks or more in TA (50% of households spent more than 11 weeks in TA in 2013- 14).
- A third (32%) spent more than 6 months in TA (24% in 2013- 14).
- 1 in 10 households spent over a year in TA (this is the same as in 2013- 14).

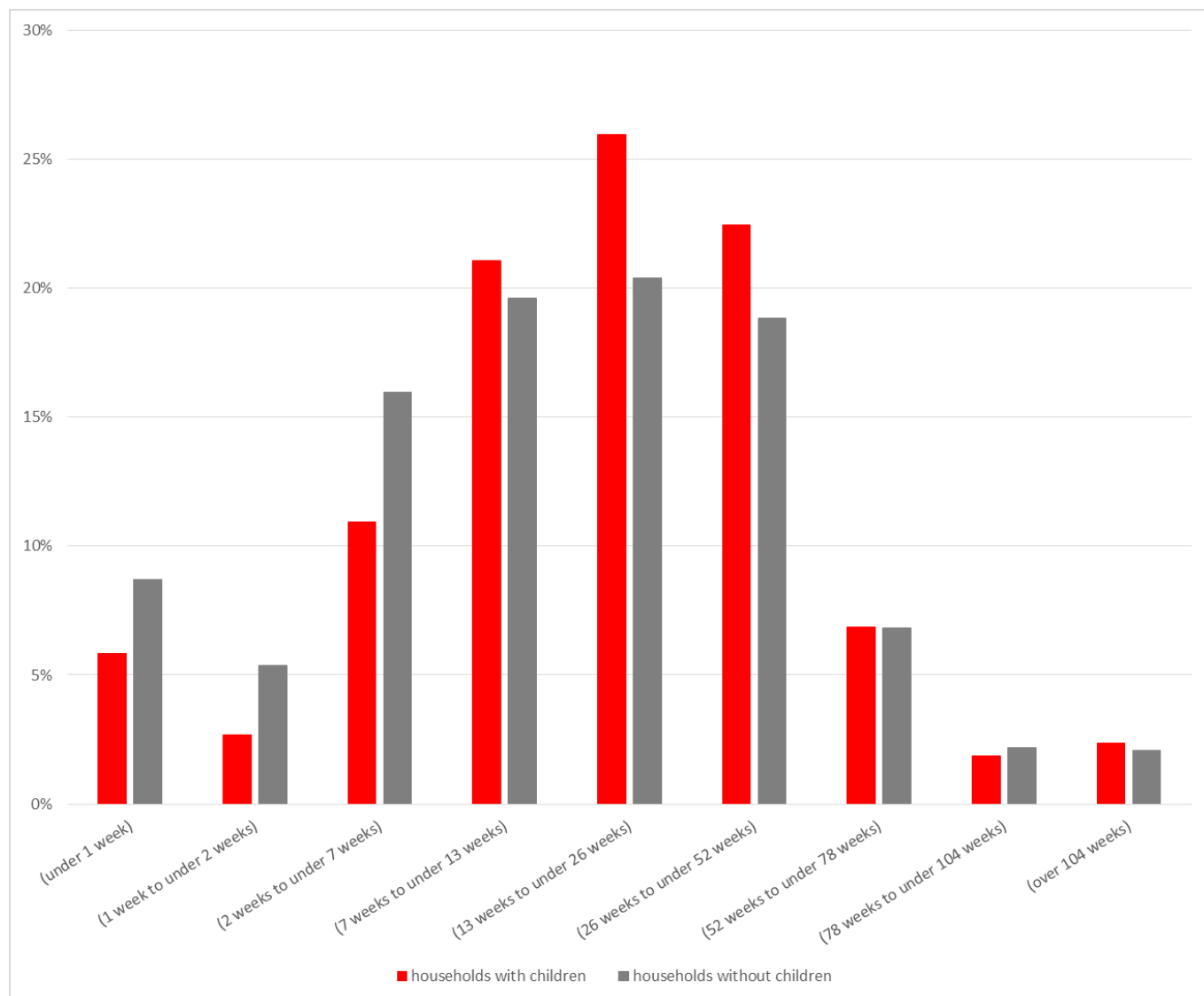


Chart 1: Percentage of cases closed by time spent in temporary accommodation

Data from our FOI request helped us to identify the differing patterns for households with and without children, as shown in Chart 1 above:

- Households without children were more likely to have spent small amounts of time in temporary accommodation. In the same vein, more households with children spent longer periods in temporary accommodation, up until a year when patterns of case closures for households with and without children converged. From Chart 1 above, it can be seen that more households without children spent shorter periods in TA, up to 7 weeks.

- The majority of households both with and without children spent between 2 and 52 weeks in temporary accommodation (80% of households with children and 75% of households without children). 14% of households without children spent less than 2 weeks in TA, compared with 9% of households with children.
- There is a small group of households who spend a very long time in TA: 11% of households with and without children spent over a year in TA.
- The median time spent in TA is higher for households with children, at 17 weeks, than households without children, at 13 weeks.

Our data request did not include a question on outcomes for households once leaving TA, and as such we cannot be sure whether the high proportion of households spending short periods of time in TA was because they are being placed in permanent accommodation, or because they are leaving TA before they receive an offer of settled accommodation, or because they achieve another positive outcome.

### **3. What type of temporary accommodation do households stay in?**

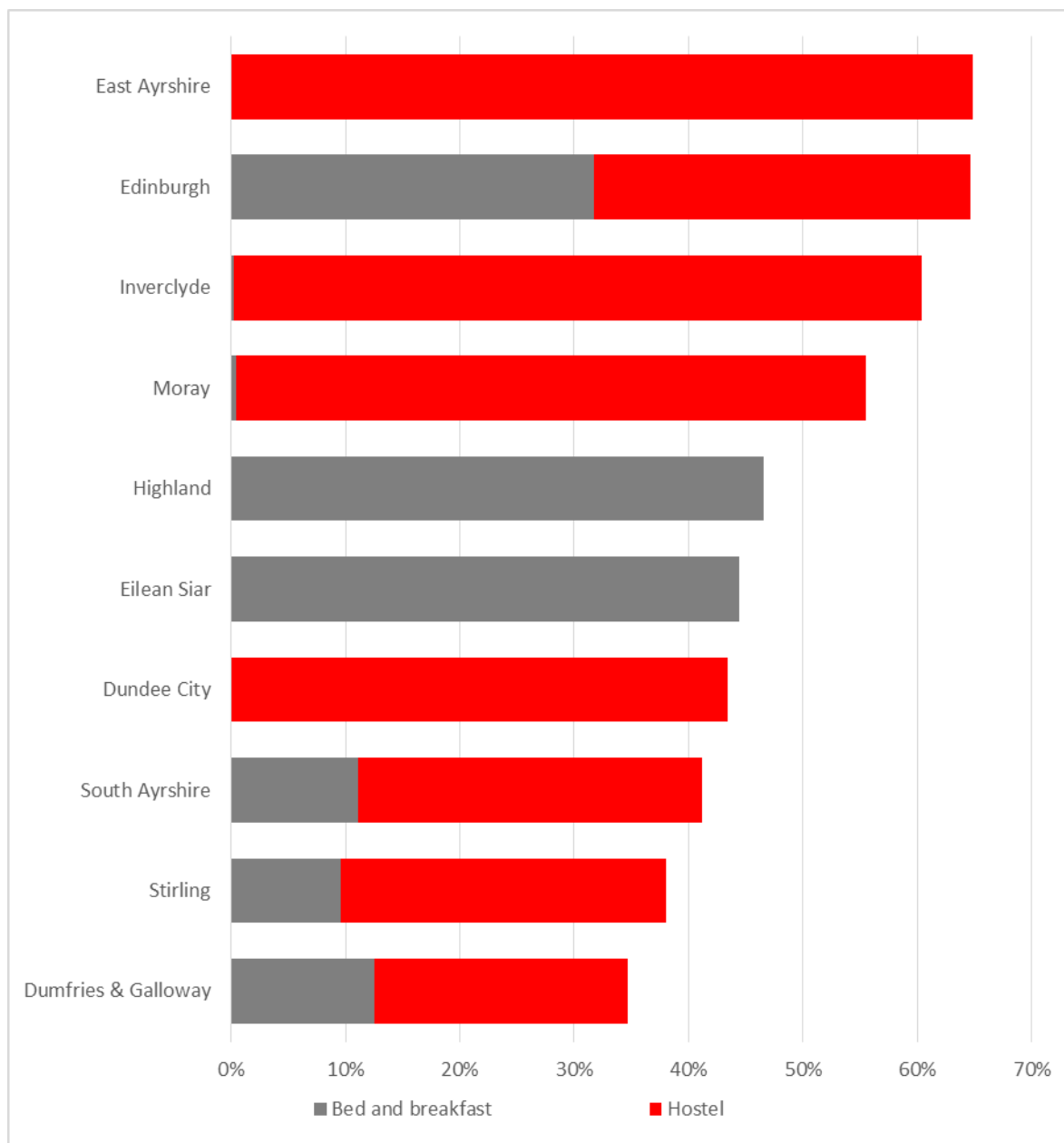
- 40% of all temporary accommodation days provided by local authorities were in 'ordinary local authority dwellings' and 19% in RSL dwellings.<sup>18</sup> However, the picture changes dramatically across local authorities.
- Over half of all TA provision in some parts of the country is in hostels or bed and breakfast hotels. In Edinburgh and East Ayrshire, 65% of temporary accommodation days were in hostels or bed and breakfast hotels (compared to 28% in Scotland), and there were similarly high numbers in Inverclyde (60%) and Moray (55%).

Bed and breakfast hotels and hostel accommodation do not provide suitable accommodation for homeless households, often lacking basic amenities such as cooking facilities. In some exceptional situations they do provide the best available option but should largely be avoided as a form of TA, particularly for vulnerable households. The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004 requires local authorities to ensure that homeless households with children, and pregnant women, are not placed in unsuitable TA, including B&B accommodation unless under exceptional circumstances. As such, it is important to understand to what extent these types of accommodation are being used by local authorities, and the evidence around how long homeless households are spending in this type of TA.

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<sup>18</sup> All data in this section is taken from the Scottish Housing Regulator: Annual Return of the Charter 2014-15, <https://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/publications/charter-data-all-social-landlords>

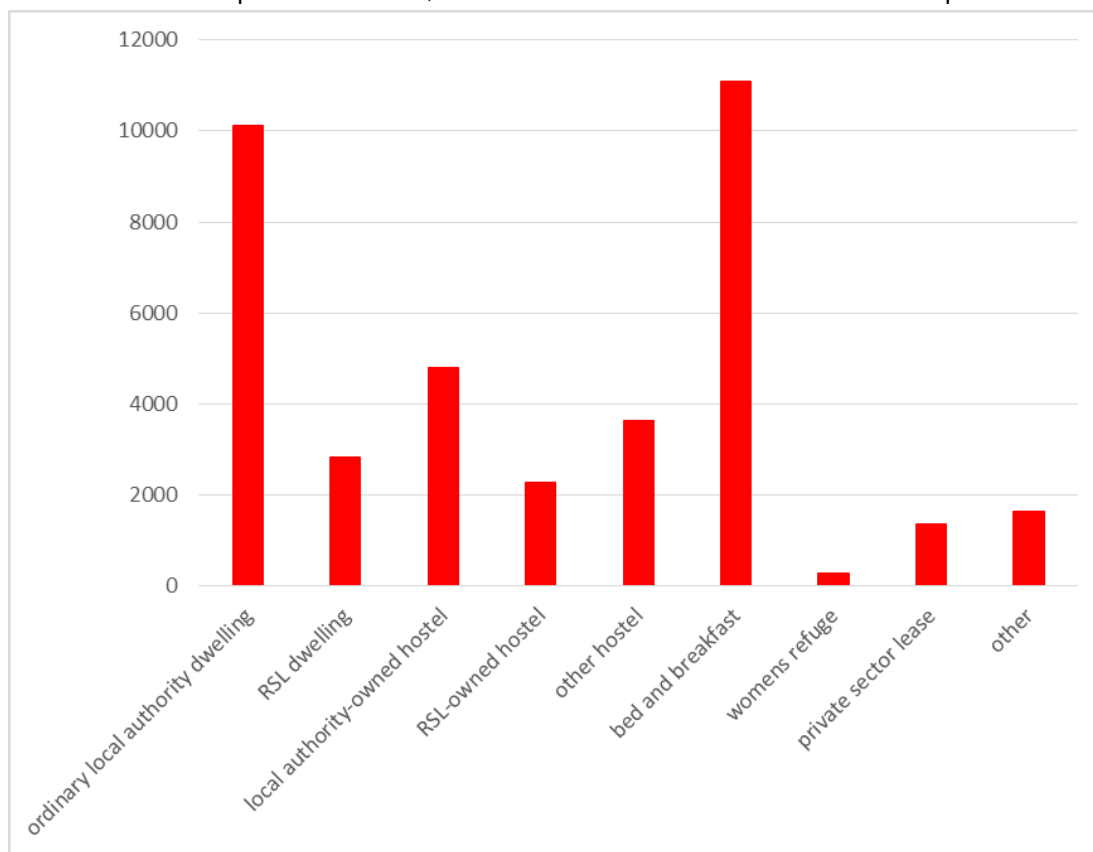




*Chart 2: Councils where more than a third of temporary accommodation was provided in bed and breakfast or hostel accommodation: 2014-15*

- Over 10,100 households whose cases closed in 2014-15 spent time in local authority accommodation, nearly 11,105 spent time in bed and breakfast accommodation, and 10,718 in hostels (any type). [Chart 3]
- More households spent time in bed and breakfast accommodation than any other type of accommodation. However, while a high number of households spent time in bed and breakfast accommodation the average time they spent in this type of accommodation (33 days) was markedly lower than the average time spent by households in local authority dwellings (137 days), registered social landlord dwellings (225 days) or private leases (211 days).

- It seems likely that the fact that there is a relatively high number of households housed in bed and breakfast TA together with the relatively low time spent in this type of accommodation is due in part to a pattern of initial placement in bed and breakfast followed, for longer duration cases, by households moving on to TA with a local authority, registered social landlord or private sector leased dwelling. However, it may also be that some households leave this type of accommodation and do not achieve a positive outcome. Future data analysis from the HL3 will give a clearer picture of to what extent these patterns occur, and the effect on households of this practice.



*Chart 3: Number of households spending time in each type of temporary accommodation whose case closed 2014-15*

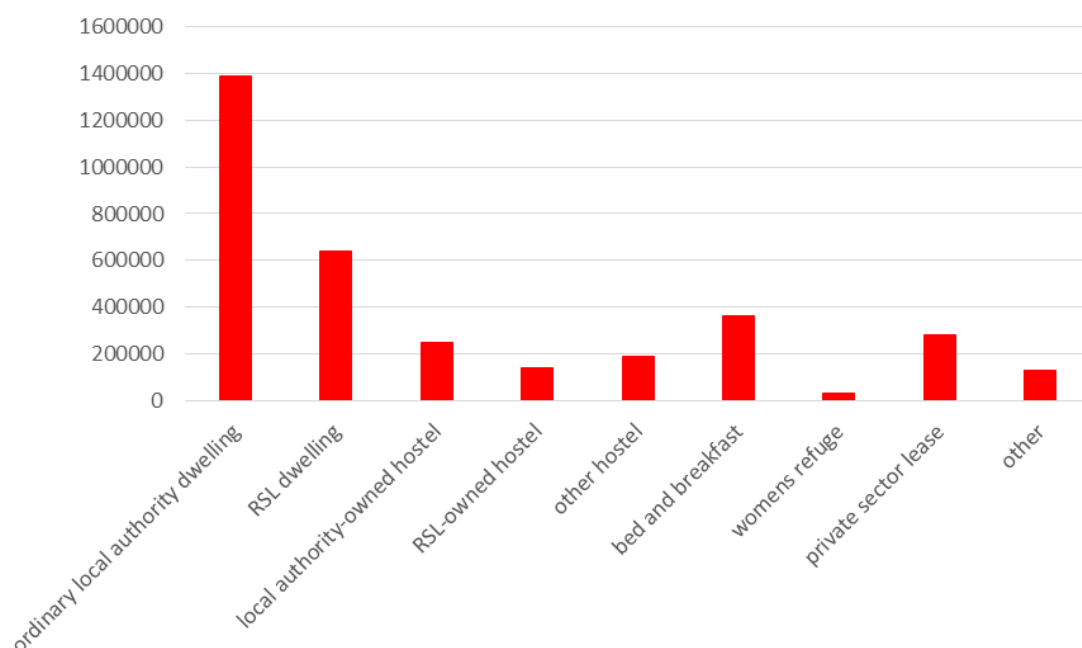


Chart 4: Total number of days spent in each type of accommodation, 2014-15

#### 4. What types of temporary accommodation were offered and refused, and what were the satisfaction levels with temporary accommodation occupied?

- In 2014-15 Scottish local authorities made 44,138 offers of TA to homeless households.<sup>19</sup>
- 27% of offers made were for ordinary local authority dwellings, and 27% for bed and breakfast accommodation.
- Of the 44,138 offers made in 2014-15, 2,987 were refused (6.8% of all offers made).<sup>20</sup>
- The proportions of offers refused varied between 3.3% for the relatively small numbers of offers of TA in women's refuges (11 of 330 offers), up to 8.7% of offers made for TA in 'other hostels' (413 of 4,726), 8.2% of 'other' accommodation types (176 of 2,143) and similarly 8.0% of 'ordinary local authority dwellings' (960 of 12,002).<sup>21</sup>
- Of 11,777 offers of TA in bed and breakfast accommodation, 601 were refused. At 5.1%, this was the lowest refusal rate after that of women's refuges noted above. This might suggest that in some circumstances bed and breakfast is an acceptable option for

<sup>19</sup>All data in this section is taken from the Scottish Housing Regulator: Annual Return of the Charter 2014-15, <https://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/publications/charter-data-all-social-landlords>, Local authority ARC indicator on offers of temporary accommodation for 2014-15.

<sup>20</sup>Local authority ARC indicator on offers of temporary accommodation for 2014-15, Source: Scottish Housing Regulator: Annual Return of the Charter 2014-15, <https://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/publications/charter-data-all-social-landlords>

<sup>21</sup> Source: Scottish Housing Regulator: Annual Return of the Charter 2014-15, <https://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/publications/charter-data-all-social-landlords>

homeless households – or it may be that they have no options but to accept the offer. As noted above, while a high number of households spent time in bed and breakfast accommodation the average time they spent in this type of accommodation (33 days) was markedly lower and suggests it is likely that bed and breakfast is often used as short-term emergency accommodation until more suitable TA can be arranged.

- The level of user satisfaction with TA varies dramatically across local authorities, from 99% satisfaction in North Ayrshire to 52% in Dumfries and Galloway. However, data is not available by type of TA occupied, and local authorities asked the question of only a very small proportion of those leaving a TA placement (5,738 households). Therefore, care must be taken when drawing conclusions from this data.

## Conclusion

The provision of temporary accommodation is an important element of Scotland's progressive homelessness legislation. For thousands of households every year this provision provides an important safety net in times of crisis. However, the average time spent in so-called temporary accommodation is 23 weeks, with 1 in 10 households spending over a year there. This suggests that that local authorities can struggle to move on households that have a right to settled, permanent accommodation in a timely manner.

The provision of temporary accommodation in itself is not enough; it is essential that this is seen as and used as a positive step away from homelessness. In light of the ongoing funding threats and pressures to temporary accommodation in Scotland, we must ensure that minimum standards are met around the quality of temporary accommodation, and that the necessary support and services are provided, particularly for the 1 in 10 households spending over a year there. This will ensure that time spent in temporary accommodation is worthwhile and that when the time comes, any moves into permanent accommodation are sustainable. Shelter Scotland reiterates our previous calls for the development of Scottish Government endorsed guidance for minimum standards for all households in TA, building on the standards Shelter Scotland jointly produced with the Chartered Institute of Housing in 2010.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Shelter Scotland and CIH Scotland, Temporary accommodation guidance, January 2011

[http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional\\_resources/policy\\_library/policy\\_library\\_folder/temporary\\_accommodation\\_guidance](http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/temporary_accommodation_guidance)

Our research shows that more households spent time in bed and breakfast accommodation than any other type of accommodation. We are concerned that for the most vulnerable households, especially those who have multiple and complex needs, this does not represent suitable accommodation. We call for local authorities to redouble their efforts to provide more appropriate temporary accommodation and support for this group.

A renewed emphasis on the delivery of affordable housing in Scotland is also necessary to ensure that long stays in temporary accommodation are reduced and to tackle the affordability concerns around the current level of temporary accommodation provision for local authorities. Recent research commissioned by Shelter Scotland, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and the Chartered Institute of Housing calls for a commitment to meet the need for 12,000 affordable homes each year for the next five years.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</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)

## Appendix: Background to data sources used

### The sources

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

1. The quarterly temporary accommodation statistics collected by Scottish Government statisticians from Scottish local authorities.<sup>24</sup> This provides information on:
  - Number of households in temporary accommodation by type of accommodation at the end of each quarter.
  - Number of such households which have children or a household member pregnant; and number of children in such households.
2. Performance information gathered by the Scottish Housing Regulator in 2015 on local authority performance in providing temporary accommodation to homeless households.<sup>25</sup> These provide information, for homeless households whose case was closed in 2013-14, on:
  - Number who spent time in each type of temporary accommodation during their homelessness application.
  - The total amount of time spent in each type of accommodation.
  - Offers and refusals of offers for each type of temporary accommodation.
  - Whether households were satisfied with the temporary accommodation they had used.
3. Information supplied by the 27 local authorities who responded to Shelter Scotland's freedom of information request for supplementary information not covered in the Scottish Government statistics or the ARC indicator data. This provided information for homeless households whose case was closed in 2014-15 on:
  - The number and proportion who did/ did not spend time in temporary accommodation arranged by the local authority separately for households with/ without children.
  - For those who spent time in temporary accommodation the total amount of time in temporary accommodation, separately for households with and without children.

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<sup>24</sup> This is the quarterly HL2 return, available at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/RefTables>

<sup>25</sup> These are part of the suite of ARC indicators introduced by the regulator, available at <http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/>

While 27 local authorities responded to the freedom of information request, not all local authorities were able to provide information at the full level of detail requested.

### **Future developments**

As part of the development of homelessness statistics the Scottish Government is developing a new data collection – the HL3 return. This will provide information linking the use of temporary accommodation with the circumstances of households who become homeless and the outcomes of their homeless application. We expect the first published statistics based on this new return to be available in Summer 2017. Shelter Scotland welcomes this development, which would allow us to address some of the questions raised in this paper.