



# **Orkney Islands Council**

## **A Profile of Homelessness 2023 - 2028**

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## Introduction

Since 2002 we have been publishing a Profile of Homelessness.

It is important to analyse demographic trends and other issues specific to the local area in order to appropriately plan and target our service provision and to ensure it is inclusive of all groups within our society. We need to obtain a detailed picture of the issues underlying homelessness in Orkney before we can appropriately seek to tackle it.

The strategic landscape surrounding homelessness has changed significantly in recent years. The Profile of Homelessness now underpins the Homelessness Strategy, the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and also a chapter within the Local Housing Strategy which focuses on homelessness.

This revised Profile of Homelessness for 2023, seeks to determine the current situation surrounding homelessness in Orkney generally and also throughout the individual communities and 20 inhabited islands which make up the area.

## **Part One: General Trends and Issues affecting Homelessness**

The Housing Needs and Demand Assessment from 2013 provides a significantly more detailed overview of Orkney's demographics, tenure split, income levels and general housing need. The information below takes some of the key points related to homelessness from the Housing Needs and Demand Assessment as well as some up to date figures for other homelessness related areas.

During 2023 the Housing Needs and Demand Assessment will be updated. In addition, an enhanced piece of work is being undertaken to appropriately assess the housing needs of Orkney's workforce.

### **Demographic Trends**

#### **Demographic projections for Orkney show a slow but steady population increase**

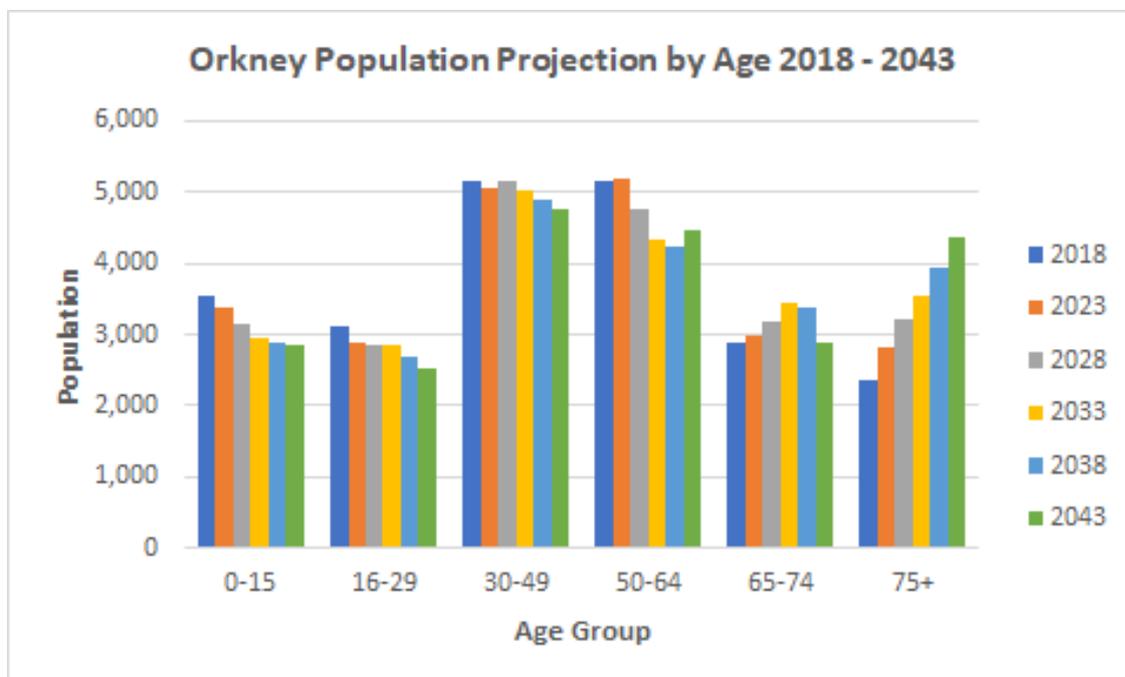
The population in Orkney rose from 19,560 in 1991 to 21,400 in 2011 (Census day figures Scotland's Census 2013). In June 2018 it stood at approximately 22,190. The Census in Scotland was delayed due to the pandemic and was carried out in 2022. It is expected that information from the 2022 Census will be published from 2023 onwards. Population projections suggest that population levels in Orkney will remain stable initially and begin a slight decline in 2033 based on National Records of Scotland estimates 2018. The number of households is also anticipated to increase from the current level of around 11,471. More detail on population projections is available in our Local Housing Strategy.

#### **Population on the outer isles**

Conversely there was a sizable drop in the population of Orkney's outer islands between 1991 and 2001. This has now levelled off and in some cases started to rebound. However, there is still a concern about the sustainability of some vulnerable island communities. Falling school rolls, an aging demographic and increased care needs are all factors that can come into play. There is a general drift from outlying areas of the Mainland and isles to the larger settlements. It is at present still unclear whether this drift to the main settlements reflects the preference of households or whether a lack of housing options, economic opportunities and wider infrastructure precipitates outward migration. It is also unclear how the impact of the pandemic may affect this in the longer term with a potentially increased ability for many people to be able to work from home. Population projections developed by the Housing Service, based on National Records of Scotland projections and births, deaths and migration levels over the last 20 years would suggest that isles populations may decline from approximately 2,692 in 2021 to 2,575 by 2027.

## An ageing population

Population projections also reveal an increasingly older population. The graph below shows the estimated population projections based on 2018 National Records of Scotland statistics. As can be seen there is a large variance between age groups over the time period. The number of people in the 0 – 15 and 16 – 29 age group drops over the period. The 30 – 49 age group remains stable and then drops slightly while the 50 – 64 age group declines and then starts to build. The 65 – 74 range climbs and then declines down to earlier levels. The most notable change is amongst the 75+ age group. The 75+ age group is climbing significantly from a starting point of around 2,300 in 2018 and reaching 4,300 by 2043. The percentage of the population that is 75+ is predicted to rise from 11% in 2018 to 20% in 2043. This is significant and will pose challenges to various services. As well as an aging native population the increase in older people may also be influenced by the inward migration of older people into Orkney from elsewhere in Scotland and the UK.



Data provided by NHS Orkney enables us to look at the population (by age) distributed across Orkney and shows us that across Orkney the 45 – 64 age group represents the most significant proportion of those registered at GP surgeries in Orkney.

<b>Practice.</b>	<b>Persons aged 0-4.</b>	<b>Persons aged 5-14.</b>	<b>Persons aged 15 - 24.</b>	<b>Persons aged 25 - 44.</b>	<b>Persons aged 45 - 64.</b>	<b>Persons aged 65 - 74.</b>	<b>Persons aged 75 - 84.</b>	<b>Persons aged 85+.</b>	<b>Patient Total.</b>
Skerryvore.	453.	979.	843.	2,252.	2,357.	907.	568.	208.	8,567.
Stromness.	103.	288.	276.	631.	984.	428.	282.	90.	3,082.
St Margaret's Hope.	58.	176.	110.	308.	493.	233.	120.	35.	1,533.
Islands View (Rousay).	11.	23.	20.	47.	81.	58.	33.	5.	278.
Heilendi.	162.	360.	340.	910.	1,123.	540.	342.	109.	3,886.
Dounby.	110.	250.	259.	508.	937.	420.	263.	89.	2,836.
Orcades.	65.	206.	141.	311.	631.	298.	225.	66.	1,943.
<b>Total.</b>	<b>962.</b>	<b>2,282.</b>	<b>1,989.</b>	<b>4,967.</b>	<b>6,606.</b>	<b>2,884.</b>	<b>1,833.</b>	<b>602.</b>	<b>22,125.</b>

Heilendi includes Shapinsay and North Ronaldsay.

Stromness includes Flotta and Graemsay.

Orcades combines Eday, Hoy, Sanday, Stronsay, Westray, Papa Westray.

The inward migration of older people to Orkney has a considerable impact on the housing system. Although many of the older population are economically inactive, their purchasing power in the housing market is a major factor and has encouraged prices to rise beyond the reach of many indigenous young people and lower income households.

Taking into account the projected increase of older households the policy basis has been to ensure that care and support are delivered while the client remains at home, in homely surroundings provided this is appropriate.

A prerequisite to this is the quality of the homes and the range of facilities contained in an individual's home to enable adequate care and support to be delivered. Older people often experience difficulties in maintaining the fabric of their homes. This is clearly an issue within Orkney where there have been problems with Below Tolerable Standard Housing. The Scottish House Condition Survey (2017-19) estimates that 31% of households in Orkney are in fuel poverty and 22% in extreme fuel poverty. If the household is headed by an older person, those figures become 41% and 34% respectively. The Scottish House Condition Survey (2017-19) states "These are a best estimate of fuel poverty under the new definition of fuel poverty and cannot be compared to previous local authority analysis figures." The population in the Orkney Isles along with those in other Scottish Island Authorities are particularly severely impacted by the energy crisis.

A Care and Repair scheme operates in Orkney and has played an important role in enabling older owner occupiers, especially, to remain in their homes, rather than having to move to specialist accommodation.

## **Ethnicity**

The 2011 Census indicates that there are 626 individuals making up an estimated 285 households from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Groups in Orkney. This indicates that 2.93% of Orkney households are from BME groups and this is an increase from a figure of 0.3% of households in the 2001 census.

## **Increase in number of households**

The number of households in Orkney was expected to rise over the coming years from the base level estimation of 10,500 in 2018 to just over 11,000 by 2028 based on housing projections from 2018 National Records of Scotland statistics. A large proportion of that increase was predicted to come from an increase in single person households. The expectation was that the average household size will drop from 2.15 in 2018 to 2.07 in 2028 according to projections from 2018 National Records of Scotland statistics. However, the current level of houses in Orkney is 11,471 and therefore some revision of the forecasts is required. It is anticipated that the next census will assist in this respect.

## Economic Trends

Unemployment levels in Orkney have been consistently among the lowest in Scotland for a number of years. Unemployment has been 3% or below for a number of years. The figure for 2021/2122 is 2.8% compared to the Scottish figure 3.4% and the British one of 4.1%.

The Orkney population also has the highest economic activity rate in Scotland with 79.2% of the working age population being economically active in 2021/2022, this compares to the Scottish figure of 76.5% (NOMIS, Office for National Statistics).

Orkney shows signs of displaying a tight labour market. A tight labour market is one where “the demand for labour is near or exceeds the supply of labour” as defined by FutureSkills Scotland. This can create problems for businesses when it comes to recruiting suitable labour locally. Consequently, the need to bring in labour from outwith Orkney can have a significant impact on the housing market, with employers needing to find accommodation for the incoming workforce. Although economic activity is relatively high, income levels are relatively low as demonstrated in the table below.

### Average Weekly Earnings by Area (2021)

Area	Average weekly wage
Great Britain	£613.10
Scotland	£622.00
Orkney	£565.20
Highland	£611.40
Eilean Siar	£670.10
Shetland	£677.90

(NOMIS, Office for National Statistics; 2022)

The table above shows that comparisons between the UK and Scottish averages, as well as neighbouring authorities, Orkney’s average weekly wage is very low.

The table below shows that the social rented sector is the sector of choice for lower income households who may require more assistance through Housing Benefit or the housing costs element of Universal Credit.

### Percentage of tenants in receipt of housing benefit

Tenure.	Percentage.
Council	40%.
Housing Association.	33%.
Private Rented.	10%.

## Percentage of tenants in receipt of housing benefit

Tenure.	Percentage.
Council and OHAL.	16%.
Private Rented.	4%.

(Source: Orkney Islands Council Housing Benefit Section; 2021)

## Housing Trends

As of the 31 December 2022 Orkney had a total housing stock of 11,640 properties. The majority of these properties are houses, with flats only accounting for 5% of the stock at the 2018 Local House Condition Survey (LHCS 2018). The stock is also relatively old, with 35% of properties built before 1945, in comparison to the national average of 31% (Scottish House Condition Survey 2016- 2018).

### Housing tenure in Orkney

Owner occupation is the predominant tenure in Orkney, with an estimated 65% of the population owning their own property in 2019 (Scottish Government Housing Statistics, stock by tenure 2020). Social renting from a local authority or housing association is considerably less prevalent in Orkney than in the rest of Scotland at just 15%, well under the national average of 23%.

Council housing is predominantly concentrated in the main settlements of Kirkwall and Stromness with only a third of all Council properties located outside these areas. The Council has housing stock in most islands (10 islands in addition to mainland Orkney) however, there is no Council provision in North Ronaldsay or Papa Westray. Total Council housing stock is 1011 including 73 Council owned properties used for emergency housing.

There is one Registered Social Landlord in Orkney – Orkney Housing Association Ltd (OHAL). OHAL's stock is situated again mainly in Kirkwall and Stromness. It has some but limited provision in rural mainland areas or the outer isles and this includes South Ronaldsay, Burray, Shapinsay, Westray and North Ronaldsay. OHAL have a total of 808 rented properties along with 149 Shared Ownership and Shared Equity properties.

In Orkney the private rented sector (which comprises households in private rented, tied accommodation and with a 'life rent') is estimated to stand at 10% and is roughly the same size as that estimated for Scotland as a whole – 14% (Scottish Government Housing Statistics, 2020). It is unusually large in comparison with the social rented sector. There are over 1,100 registered private rents in Orkney and these do not include tied accommodation or properties let to close family members, of which Orkney is believed to have a significant number. Although housing options are limited outwith the owner occupied sector, which poses particular problems for low-income households, the private rented sector can provide a valuable option to those who cannot access the social rented sector.

## Specific Housing Issues

### The Need for Additional Social Housing

At 31 March 2022, the waiting list for social rented housing stood at 893 – a 62.7% increase from March 2014 and a 170% increase from the figures quoted in our original profile of homelessness in 2002. At 1 February 2023, the waiting list stood at 1128 representing increases of 105% (since 2014) and 241% (since 2002).

During 2021/22 the Council had 118 vacancies to fill, which were allocated as follows:

- 72 Homeless Households (48 Kirkwall, 17 Stromness, 6 Mainland, 1 Isles).
- 6 Emergency Platinum (3 Kirkwall, 1 Mainland, 1 Isles, 1 Stromness).
- 3 Medical (2 Kirkwall, 1 Isles).
- 15 Overcrowding (10 Kirkwall, 1 Stromness, 2 Mainland, 2 Isles).
- 2 Under-occupancy (2 Mainland).
- 2 Corporate Parent (2 Kirkwall).
- 7 Specific Need to be in the Community (3 Kirkwall, 1 Mainland, 2 Isles, 1 Stromness).
- 2 Unsatisfactory Living Arrangements (1 Stromness, 1 Isles).
- 0 Relationship Breakdown.
- 1 Insecurity of Tenure (1 Stromness).
- 3 Emergent households (2 Kirkwall, 1 Mainland).
- 5 No Priority (2 Kirkwall, 1 Stromness, 2 Mainland).

The average length of time that a homeless household remains in emergency housing before being offered a secure tenancy from either the Council or Orkney Housing Association Limited (OHAL) varies considerably from year to year, depending on whether new schemes are built by the Council or OHAL. Currently (2021/22) it takes, on average, 9 months for a household to be allocated a one bedroom property, 5.3 months for a family to be allocated a two bedroom property and 8.9 months for a three bedroom property.

The social rented sector has traditionally been the tenure for lower income households. Tenants who reside in the social rented sector rely more heavily on state pension and other benefits as a source of income. This is shown in the tables above for housing benefit / Universal Credit Housing Cost claimants. With the increase in rents in the social rented sector over the last few years due to on-going house build programmes and stock upgrades the gap between the rent levels of the social and private sector are narrowing. This will potentially have an effect on the affordability of housing for low income households who do not qualify for full housing benefit / Universal Credit housing costs and are required to cover a proportion of the rent themselves. Care needs to be taken however as due to the pandemic, there is some anecdotal evidence that private sector rents have risen, in some cases significantly.

Social housing continues to be the most affordable housing tenure and this has been exacerbated by recent changes to welfare reform. There will continue to be pressure for additional social housing as low income households or households on benefits struggle to meet the cost of private sector housing.

### **Below Tolerable Standard Housing**

The 2018 Local House Condition Survey, found that 3% of the total stock was below the tolerable standard. This equates to around 308 properties. This figure was considerably higher than the national Scottish figure of 1%, although it is a sizeable drop from the 12% that was recorded in the 1998 Housing Needs Survey.

Despite the consistent improvement in condition of the housing stock and the continued development of the Care and Repair scheme Orkney still has a stubbornly high level of BTS properties compared to the national average. This is partly down to the large amount of pre 1919 housing stock, but also the fact that Orkney has a lot of differing property types spread over small rural island communities and these communities have the highest levels of BTS properties.

### **Fuel Poverty**

Orkney has a relatively harsh climate in comparison to other areas of Scotland. This represents a real challenge in the fight against fuel poverty as residents face higher fuel bills to achieve an acceptable degree of comfort. The Scottish House Condition Survey: Local Authority Analysis tables (2017-19) shows 31% of households in Orkney are living in fuel poverty, compared to 24% of households in Scotland as a whole. These are a best estimate under the new definition of fuel poverty and cannot be compared to previous local authority analysis figures. It is anticipated that this situation will worsen due to the current increase in fuel costs and cost of living crisis.

Various programmes to help eradicate fuel poverty have been undertaken over the last 5 years; primarily the Scottish Government funded programmes of Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme (previously known as HEEPS: ABS) and Warmer Homes Scotland. This has been delivered alongside Council, Housing Association and third sector funded programmes.

A considerable number of insulation and energy efficiency measures have been installed in private and social housing stock to try and reduce fuel poverty. However, despite these efforts, high and rising fuel costs have continued to impact on households' abilities to escape fuel poverty. In addition, the relative stagnation of wages over the time period has also played a part.

The age of the housing stock in Orkney is also a contributing factor towards the high levels of fuel poverty. Fuel poverty is perceived to be worst in the private rented sector as old, energy inefficient housing stock combined with low wages means households need to spend more of their income heating their home.

The challenge is in developing a co-ordinated approach to accessing resources from the range of agencies and initiatives, to maximize and target resources to those most in need.

## **Housing for People with Particular Needs**

The provision of specialist or adapted housing for households with particular needs is essential in enabling all members of the community in Orkney to maintain independent lives in the areas in which they wish to live. A major challenge for Orkney is managing the projected increase in the older population, by ensuring that housing provides sustainable solutions, which respond effectively to changing need and support independence. The provision of 'barrier free' homes in new housing developments and the delivery of adaptations to existing unsuitable properties will be crucial aspects of building an appropriate infrastructure of property, care and support for older people. The range of current provision addresses the diverse needs of the population to an extent, although identified shortfalls in provision exist particularly in remote areas.

At 31 March 2022, 2.9% of the Council stock was classed as sheltered housing, located in Kirkwall and Stromness. The extra care housing scheme at Braeburn Court in St Margaret's Hope provides an additional 13 units of supported accommodation. A further 78 properties that have been adapted for other disabilities and this brings the Council total up to 11.9% of stock. Orkney Islands Property Developments Limited (OIPDL) provides a further 24 units of very sheltered accommodation in Kirkwall and additional units in Westray. OHAL provides 219 amenity properties, 58 wheelchair properties and 7 supported properties. The concentration of sheltered housing and specialist provision in the main settlements may exacerbate the outward migration of households in remote communities, as those with particular needs are forced to seek appropriate accommodation elsewhere. In addition, there are a range of supported tenancies for people with particular needs across Orkney.

The 2018 Scottish Housing Condition Survey revealed that 1% of properties in Orkney require an adaptation for the occupant. Of these households, the features that cause problems are most commonly related to handrails, replacement taps, access ramps and higher sockets, which perhaps reflects the age profile of Orkney's households.

## **Sustainability in Orkney**

Sustainability cuts across environmental, social and economic concerns. Housing has an important contribution to make in creating a more sustainable future, but this can only be achieved if sustainability is a key consideration at all stages, from location decision, layout design and specification to construction, use and maintenance. Local authorities with responsibility for land planning, strategic housing issues, as potential funders of housing construction and improvement, and through partnership activity with a wide range of agencies can bring a strong influence to bear on future development location decisions and the objectives to be achieved by that development.

Various national energy efficiency retrofit programmes have been undertaken across Orkney and the Council is currently involved in delivering the Energy Efficiency Scotland: Area Based Schemes (EES:ABS) throughout Orkney with the aim of helping reduce fuel poverty and carbon emissions, in partnership with Warmworks Scotland.

## **Specific Island Issues**

Some Communities are experiencing decline because of a combination of falling population levels and changing population profiles brought about through a complex mix of limited employment opportunities, lack of housing opportunities for new or expanding households, and demand from external housing markets pushing prices up. Equally opportunities to work from home, post pandemic, may assist to reverse some of this decline.

## **Conclusions**

The demographic profile produced here is vital to inform local service delivery that is appropriate and proportionate. Given Orkney's dispersed rural and island communities Homelessness and Housing Advice Services need to ensure that the range and type of information and advice provision is tailored to the specific needs and preferences of local people.

This point should, of course, be considered in light of some important demographic patterns that show increasing numbers of older people, of new households (for example through relationship breakdown and inward migration), and of an increasingly diverse (though numerically low) ethnic mix. Similarly, anticipated tenure changes along with increased house prices and demand for social housing are considered within the Local Housing Strategy.

The Housing Service is committed to ensuring that the tenancies it offers to homeless households threatened with homelessness are sustainable, and also that people in other forms of tenure are assisted to remain in their homes wherever practical. This requires experience in a broad range of Advice and Information services. For instance, in order to sustain their tenancy effectively, people may need information, advice and advocacy on matters such as:

- Housing benefit / Universal Credit housing costs and other benefits to pay for rent and other housing costs.
- On rights to take appropriate action, for example, information on the right to carry out improvements and make alterations in the social and private housing sector.
- Grants that are available to help owners and tenants carry out home improvements and do repairs, as well as help tackle fuel poverty.
- Support available from other agencies, including making services accessible.

The provision of accessible services is a major element of the Housing Service's Equalities Policy and Accessibility Strategy. Advice and Information services relating to accessibility commitments are, therefore, extremely important and should link closely with the demographic profile. Advice and Information services must also cover people with other particular needs. For example, the housing needs of people seeking some form of housing support, or seeking access to specialist accommodation such as sheltered or extra care housing. In addition, consideration needs to be given to geographical accessibility linked to appropriately targeted services.

## Part Two: Service User Consultation

### Types of Consultation Undertaken

When the profile of homelessness was originally produced back in 2002 a questionnaire was sent out to past and present homeless applicants and with a response rate of over 30% the information gathered was considered very useful. Since that date we have embedded the use of customer satisfaction surveys into our services and find them extremely useful both as a method of gauging the effectiveness of our services and in further developing our services.

A rolling programme of entry and exit questionnaires is now being used and the information gleaned from this is used to inform our strategies and policies.

In addition to the questionnaire, we have in the past used focus groups to gather information and views and this is something we have continued to utilise in the development of our new homelessness strategy for 2023. We are required to undertake a whole tenant survey on a 3 yearly basis but in practice we have done this every two years so that it remains reflective of the current tenant and service user base. The survey is undertaken by an independent company on our behalf. This allowed our tenants / service users to respond openly. This information is taken forward into our annual report which is produced annually in October. Although much of the information relates to our housing services more generally, many of our tenants have originally been service users of our Homelessness and Advice Service.

Consultation is undertaken with both service users and service providers as part of our general processes around strategy development. Consultation was undertaken with other agencies during 2022 and this included consulting by electronic means and also a face to face event which allowed responses to be fuller and more developed than in the written form. In addition, a small number of interviews were undertaken with individuals who were prepared to be involved and had experienced being homeless recently. These were undertaken by telephone to ensure anonymity.

The Housing Service has a broad range of strategies covering various topics related to homelessness to a greater or lesser degree. During 2022, consultation was undertaken with service users and agencies around the revised Homelessness Strategy and Profile of Homelessness. We continue to maintain close links with many agencies involved in homelessness prevention and support services. In addition, we take part in national groups around homelessness and ensure the Orkney position is included accordingly.

The Homelessness Strategic Group, meets infrequently and oversees the implementation of the Homelessness Strategy (amongst other documents), it also looks specifically at:

- The Implementation of the Homelessness Strategy.
- The Implementation of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan.
- The Implementation of the Advice and Information Strategy.

## **Our Questionnaires**

Below are some of the comments received from our questionnaires and interviews, both positive and negative.

- “I was impressed with the help I received with the current COVID-19 outbreak ongoing.”
- “Everything was dealt with quickly, clearly and very efficiently especially with the difficulty of them working from home due to COVID-19.”
- “The cost of emergency housing for a working single mum is astronomical.”
- “Very satisfied with the written information provided as was given a very detailed pack providing all the details needed.”
- “Everybody was so helpful, I was in such a state.”

## **How do we ensure quality information provision around homelessness?**

In order to ensure we provide good quality information in relation to homelessness, we expanded our website to include a full online housing options guide. Our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan includes an action to endeavour to expand this further with the provision of an online interactive housing options app.

Across our services we have in place quality assurance processes to ensure that staff are qualified to an appropriate level so that they have the skills to assist those who need our help. We routinely check our written information to ensure accuracy and seek information around our services through processes such as a range of questionnaires and a footer on every letter which asks for comments whether positive or negative. In addition, we use information from complaints and compliments. These processes ensure that we have a stream of information in between our wholesale tenant and service user satisfaction process.

## **Related Strategies**

As part of the consultation on the revised Local Housing Strategy at the half year stage, during 2020 and development of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan, various agencies were involved in a process of consultation including development days. In addition, there was a joint seminar between the Council and Orkney Housing Association Ltd during summer 2019 to focus on the key actions within the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan.

These events were of central importance to the development of the documents concerned and a section on the outcomes of consultation can be found within each of the relevant strategies and as such will not be reproduced in great detail here. However, some general comments relating to homelessness which arose from the Local Housing Strategy consultation included:

- “Whilst homelessness is something we would all like to eradicate there are other kinds of acute housing need and I think the Housing Service has the balance of assistance just about right. Naturally if additional resources were provided by central government then all types of housing need could be addressed more quickly”.

- “While it would be preferable to move households to permanent accommodation as quickly as possible, it must be done with a care especially where children are concerned to prevent disturbance by possible enforced school changes”.

## **Identifying and Consulting with the ‘Hidden’ Homeless of Orkney**

The Homelessness and Advice Section at Orkney Islands Council is aware of the fact that people finding themselves homeless, or threatened with homelessness in Orkney, do not always present themselves to the Council. During 2021 our Tenant Participation Strategy was reviewed and a consultation will be taken forward over coming months. This will look at ensuring that we continue to involve groups within society who may be under-represented and to seek to minimise barriers to engagement.

## **Ongoing Consultation**

The Council is committed to consulting service users in the development of both new and existing services and will continue to do so, using as wide a variety of methods as possible.

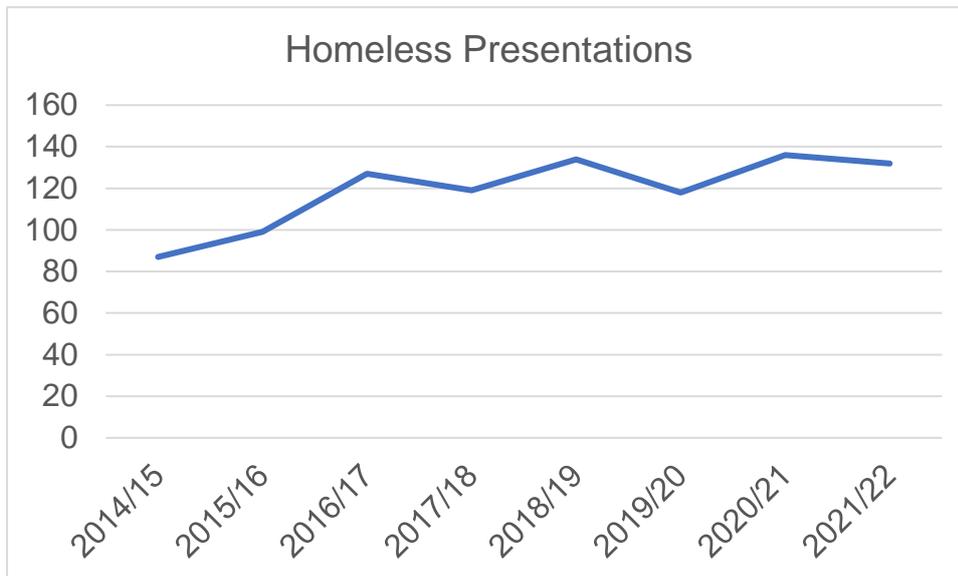
During 2022 a process of consultation was undertaken in respect of the new Profile of Homelessness, a new Homelessness Strategy and our Tenant Participation Strategy will be consulted upon in 2023. While together this amounts to a significant amount of consultation, it will be helpful to ensure that information gleaned from consultation is absolutely up to date and that it reaches a broad sector of society to ensure it remains reflective of the views of our service users and the agencies which complement our services. The Profile of Homelessness will be updated following completion of this process.

## **The Way Forward**

The national policy around homelessness has changed significantly since the original Homelessness Strategy was developed. Significant inroads have been made towards enhancing and further developing the services in Orkney which assist with the prevention and alleviation of homelessness. This has gone a significant way towards improving access to services and housing options for households experiencing homelessness and those threatened with homelessness. In addition, ongoing changes to the homelessness legislation have significantly changed the picture of homelessness across the country and are expected to continue to do so. This coupled with welfare reform has resulted in changes to the size of accommodation required. The COVID-19 pandemic, has also impacted on homelessness need and provision and is likely to continue to do so for an undetermined period of time. We will continue to work with stakeholders in expanding and improving our services to ensure they remain reflective of need.

## Part Three: The Figures

### Homelessness Presentations

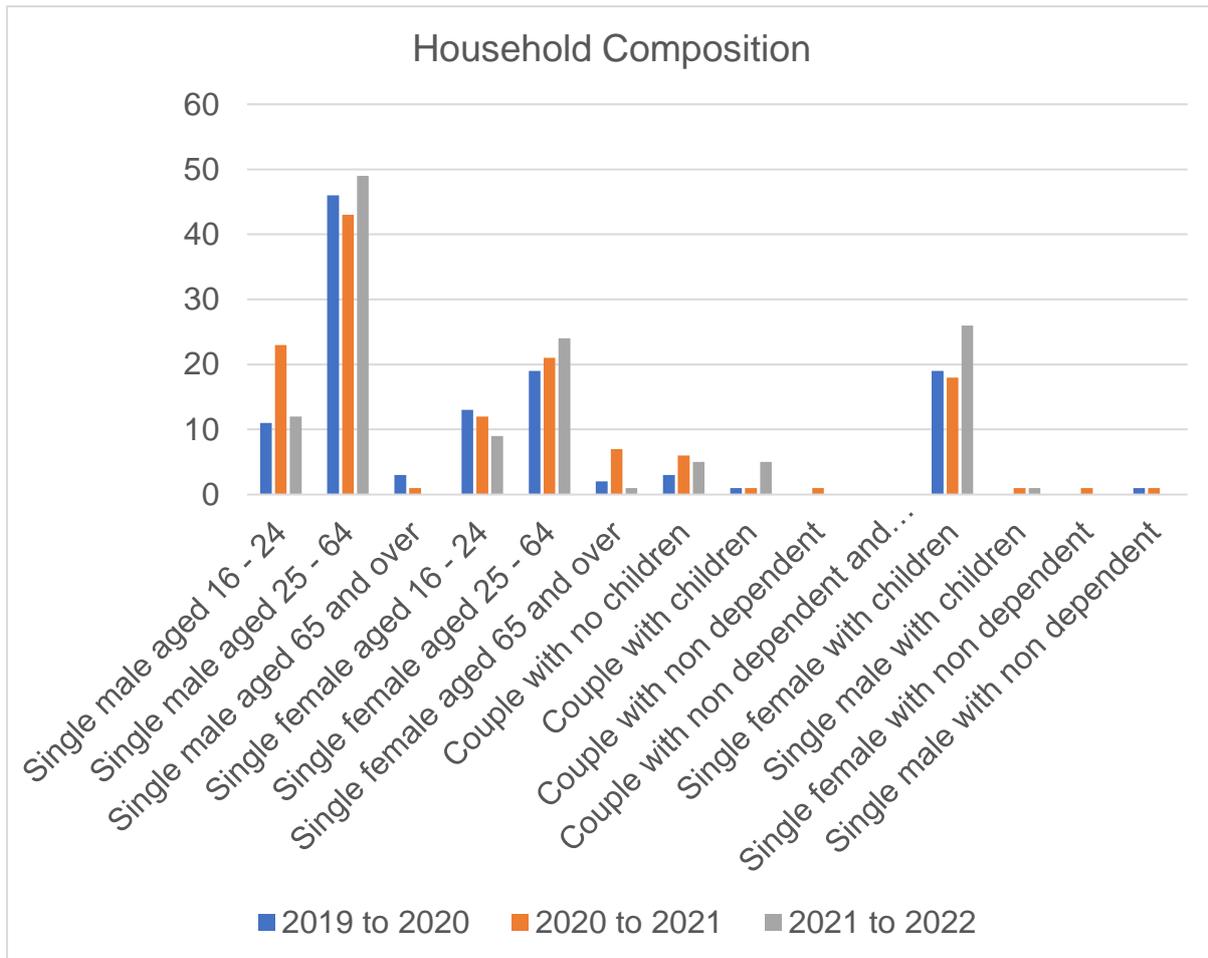


Between April 2016 and March 2021 Orkney saw a steady increase in the number of recorded homeless presentations, following a drop in presentations in 2014/15 and 2015/16. Between April 2021 and March 2022 however there was a slight fall in presentations to 132 compared to 136 in 2020/2021. Homeless presentations remain significant in relation to the size of the population and the number of social housing units becoming available each year.

The original profile of homelessness stated that “in order to identify ways of preventing homelessness, and addressing the problems faced by those who are homeless, we need to fully understand why people are approaching us.” This is still very much the case today and the rest of this section of the profile considers what if any changes have occurred since our original Profile of Homelessness was published in April 2002 and what new trends have developed in terms of why households approach as homeless, where they have come from, and the types of households that are approaching.

More recently the introduction of a housing options approach has allowed greater endeavours to prevent homelessness from occurring and this has also allowed a clear view of people’s aspirations. Despite the availability of low cost home ownership schemes for some people social housing is the only feasible option.

## Who approaches the Council as homeless?



### Single Households

Single person households continue to dominate homeless presentations in Orkney. This coupled with “under-occupancy” changes imposed by welfare reform has resulted in a greater demand for one bedroom accommodation than was previously the case.

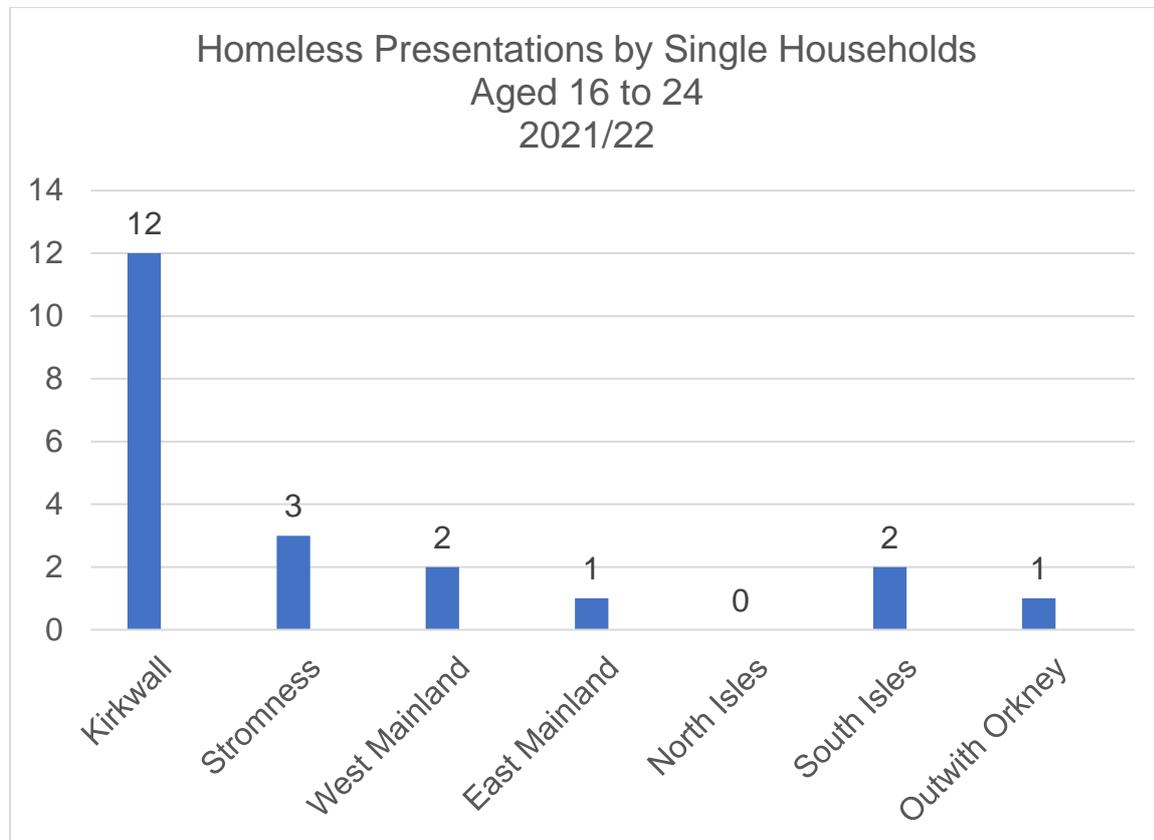
### Under 25's

In 2021/22 of the 132 applications 21, (16%), were from people under 25. This is down from a high of 37 of 127 applications, (29%), in 2016/17 as a proportion of overall applications. And, there is a slight fall compared to 2020/21 where there were 25 from a total of 136 applications, 18% of the total.

The provision of the young persons supported accommodation is vital to addressing homelessness in this client group.

Of those who present as homeless from the under 25s age group a significant number present because their parents are no longer willing or able to accommodate them. The Council's lettings policy includes a priority pass for newly emerging households. This allows some opportunity for young people to be able to obtain social housing without the need to present as homeless. However, this does depend

on the area as in areas of high demand such as Kirkwall, it is generally only households with a gold priority pass who would be able to secure social rented housing. The Local Housing Strategy focuses on the provision of other types of accommodation to assist young people to access low cost home ownership properties where this is relevant.



The graph above shows the geographic areas from where households under 25 present as homeless. As would be expected, areas like Kirkwall and Stromness as major population areas would be expected to be higher up the scale. However, it is perhaps more surprising that the number from the West and East Mainland is broadly comparable to that of the North Isles.

Single People under the age of 25 face an additional hurdle when trying to secure accommodation in the private sector as they are not entitled to full housing costs if on Universal Credit, and therefore if they are not working will find accessing accommodation very difficult.

### Single Applicants aged 25 to age of retirement

In 2021/22 of the 132 applications 73 (55%) of all applications were between 25 and 64 years of age. Of those 75 of whom approached as the result of a relationship breakdown (21 violent and 54 non-violent). A small number (3) gave up secure accommodation to approach as homeless.

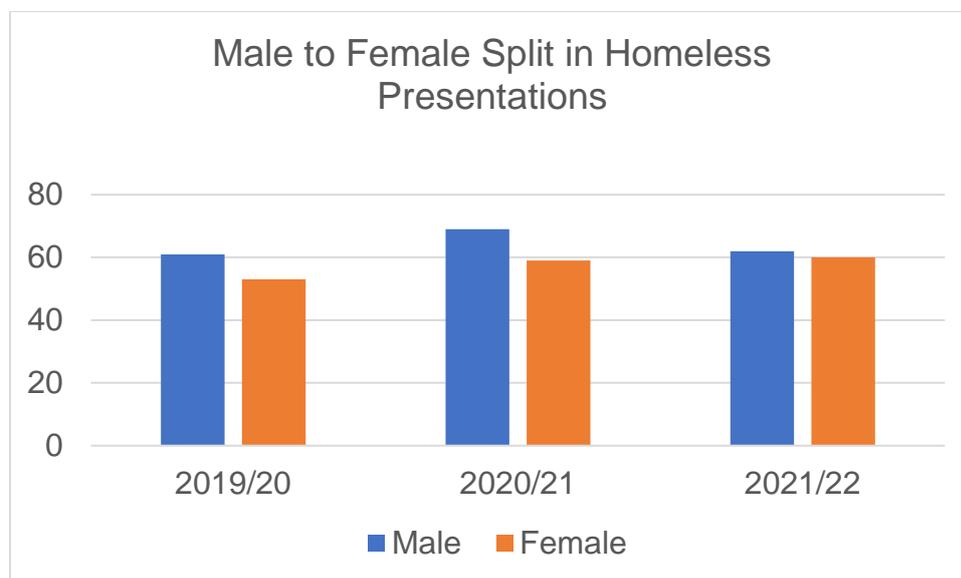
There are significant challenges in respect of the supply of smaller accommodation.

### Single Applicants over the age of retirement

There was only one single applicant, (a woman), over sixty-five years of age who approached as homeless in 2021/22. This figure is a decrease compared to 2020/21 (seven applicants) and was a rise from previous years; this was for a variety of reasons.

### Single Applicants – Male /Female Split

As the following bar chart shows the number of single male applicants remains higher than female ones and this is true across all age groups. Initial assessment show that relationship breakdown is a significant reason for homelessness approaches from single men, a problem exacerbated by the lack of affordable accommodation.



### Homeless Households with Children

In 2021/22, there were 32 households, in total, with dependent children (24%), out of 132 homeless applications. This compares to 15% in 2020/21. The total number of children in temporary accommodation as at 31st March 2022 was 20 compared to 11 children at 31 March 2021.

### Single Parent Households

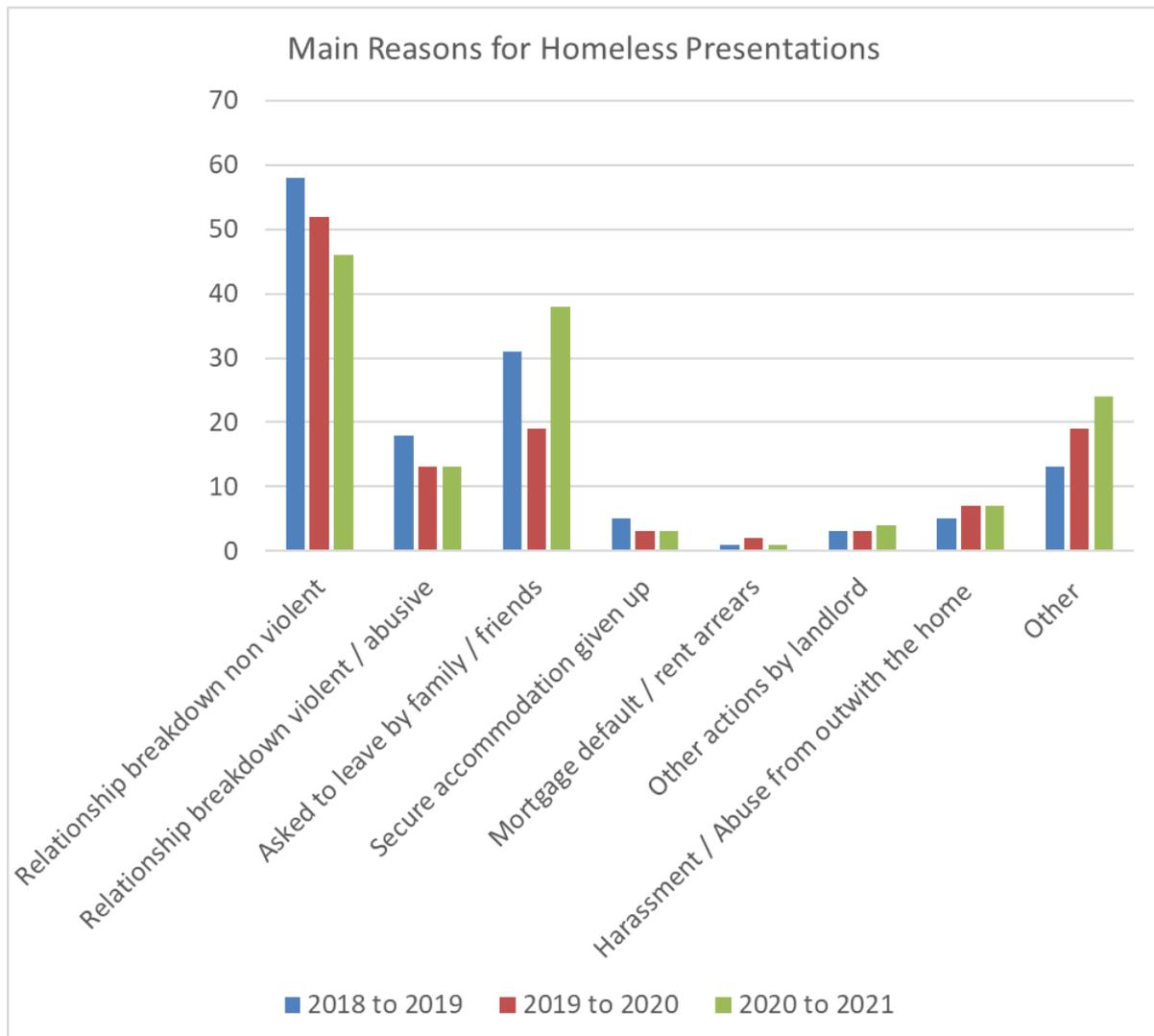
In 2021/22, there were 28 applications (21%) from single parent households which is an increase from 2020/21 where there were 19 applications which was 14% of the total, a similar proportion of single parent households applying as over the previous 3 years. Of these 28 approaches 23 were as the result of relationship breakdown (10 violent and 13 non-violent.). 1 (5%) of the single parents approaching the council were male.

## Couples with Children

In 2021/22 five couples with children presented as homeless, compared to one couple in both 2020/21 and 2019/20.

## Why are homeless presentations made?

The chart below highlights the 8 highest causes of homelessness since 2019/20.



The main causes of homelessness have remained predominantly the same for the last decade, with the two main causes being relationship breakdown, and family / friends no longer being willing / able to accommodate being largely responsible for the bulk of homelessness applications.

## Relationship Breakdown

The level of non-violent relationship breakdown presentations was higher in 2021/22 standing at 54 (41%) compared to the previous year which saw 46 applications (34%). In 2019/20 this reason accounted for 52 (44%) of the presentations. Of these 54, 7 were single person households ages 16 – 24 and 30 were single person households of 25 years and over. There were also 13 households with children. This

is by far the biggest single reason behind homeless approaches in Orkney and must be addressed by the homelessness strategy.

### **Non-Abusive Relationship breakdown**

In addition to looking at the way homeless applications are processed, it is important that the Homelessness Strategy emphasises the importance of prevention work including making use of Counselling and Family Mediation Services.

### **Abusive Relationships**

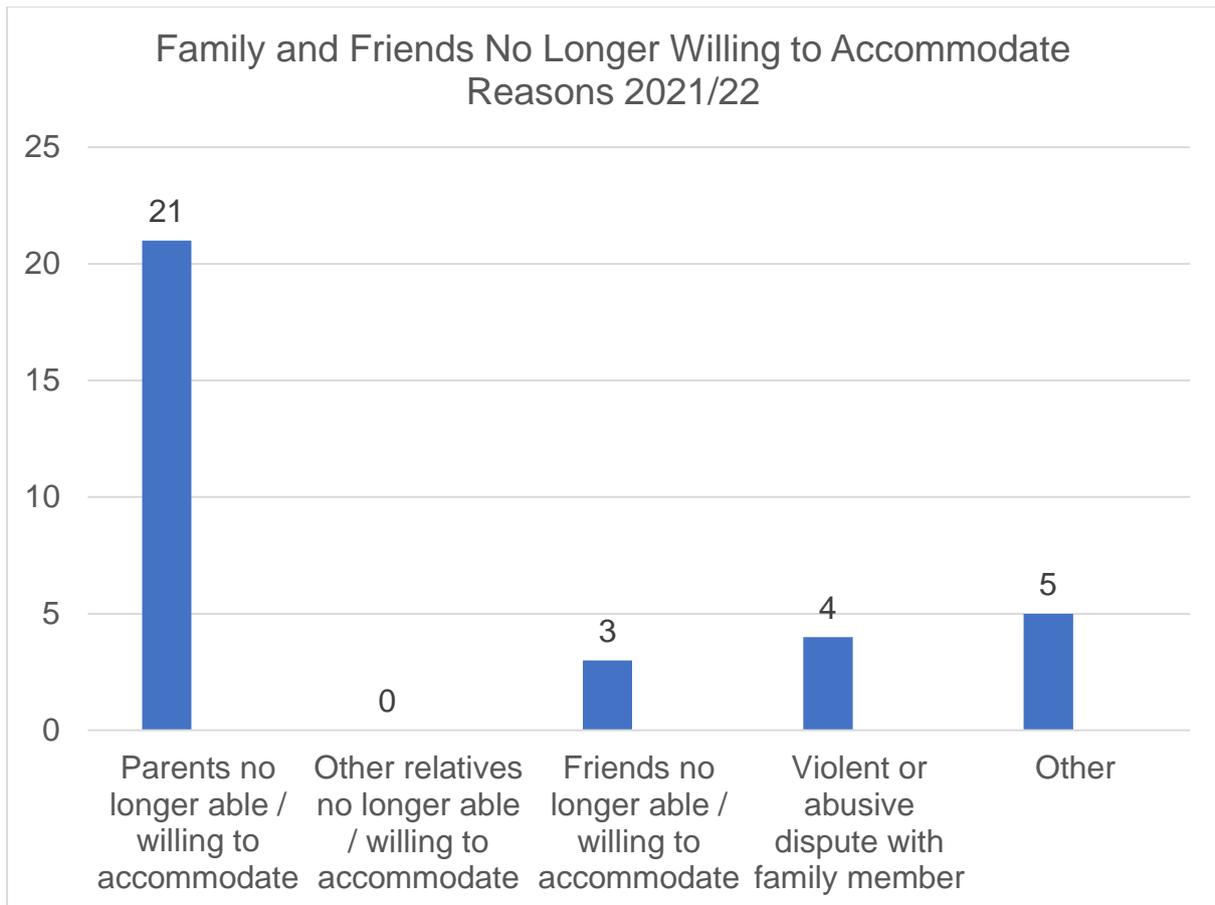
In 2021/22 there was an increase of applications due to relationship breakdown violent/abusive 21 cases (16%) of the total compared to 13 presentations (9.5%) in 2020/21. Homeless presentations due to domestic abuse remains significant. Nationally it was anticipated that during 2020 to 2021, there may be a higher level of homelessness presentations as a result of domestic abuse than in previous years. This was due to the pandemic leading to families being at home together for greater periods of time, the potential for consumption of alcohol etc to be higher and COVID-19 restrictions potentially making it more difficult for someone experiencing abuse to be able to seek help. While locally the figures did not register an increase in homelessness presentations, there is still a need to monitor the situation closely.

Through the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan we have updated our movable CCTV packages which can be readily sited in properties throughout the community as required, to assist to combat domestic abuse.

Temporary accommodation and support is provided through Phoenix House Refuge and there are 4 units of move on accommodation beside Phoenix House. These units benefit from the support and proximity to the refuge and are equipped with CCTV and other security measures. In addition, temporary accommodation is provided throughout the community as required.

### **Family and Friends unable / unwilling to accommodate**

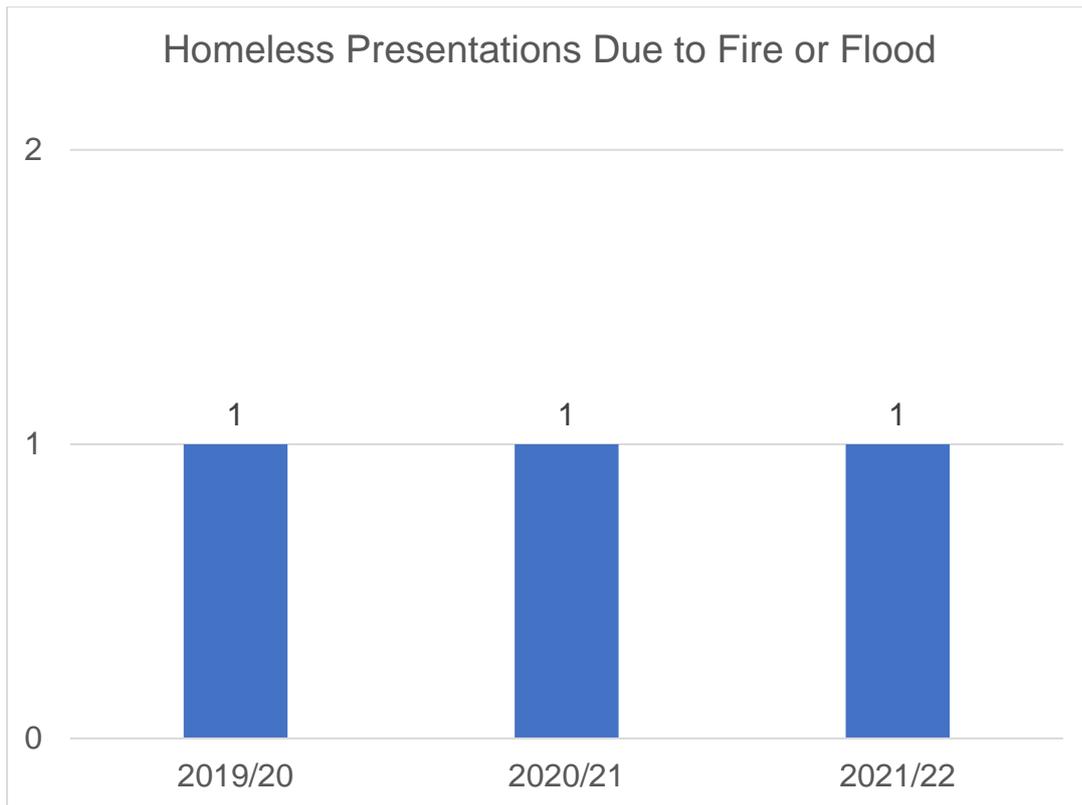
Of the 33 homeless presentations made under this category during 2021/22, 30 approached from the parental home as indicated by the following chart. Of the 30, 12 were single people aged 16 – 24, and 18 were single people over 25. Where households had not previously held accommodation elsewhere, applicants are most likely to be younger (16 – 18) and presenting from the parental home.



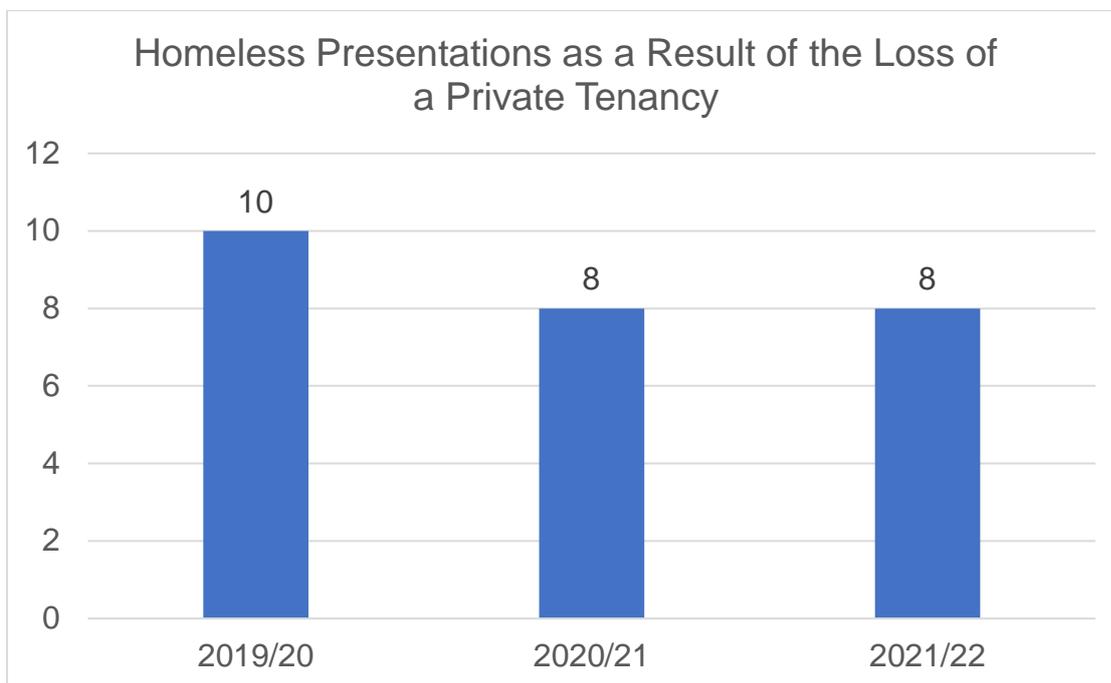
As with relationship breakdown this is a significant cause of homelessness in Orkney and measures must be put in place in order to reduce the number of applications received as a result of family / friends being unable or unwilling to accommodate. These could include increased access to mediation –and increased provision of alternative accommodation especially for those under 25 who have very limited access to accommodation in the private sector due to the level of likely entitlement to housing costs if on Universal Credit.

### **Emergency**

By their very nature emergency presentations are difficult to predict. The level of homelessness presentations as a result of emergency is relatively low and in financial years 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 was at 1 case for each year. Provision of temporary accommodation always has to be available at short notice and this is particularly true in the event of an emergency situation such as fire and flood.



### Loss of Private Rented Accommodation



The number of households presenting with the primary reason being the loss of a private sector tenancy has dropped significantly from a peak of 32 in 2004/05 to 8 in 2020/21 and 10 in 2021/22. The reason for this drop is partially due to a legislative change which means secure tenancies are being provided by the private rented sector.

In the past the Homelessness and Advice Section often accepted households in receipt of invalid notices to quit as homeless as there was no advice service to refer them to. Today there is not only the Council's own advice and information service but also a dedicated worker with the Citizens Advice Bureau. The Council accepts homeless applications at the point that a household is in receipt of an eviction decree, prior to that stage every effort will be made to endeavour to prevent homelessness from occurring.

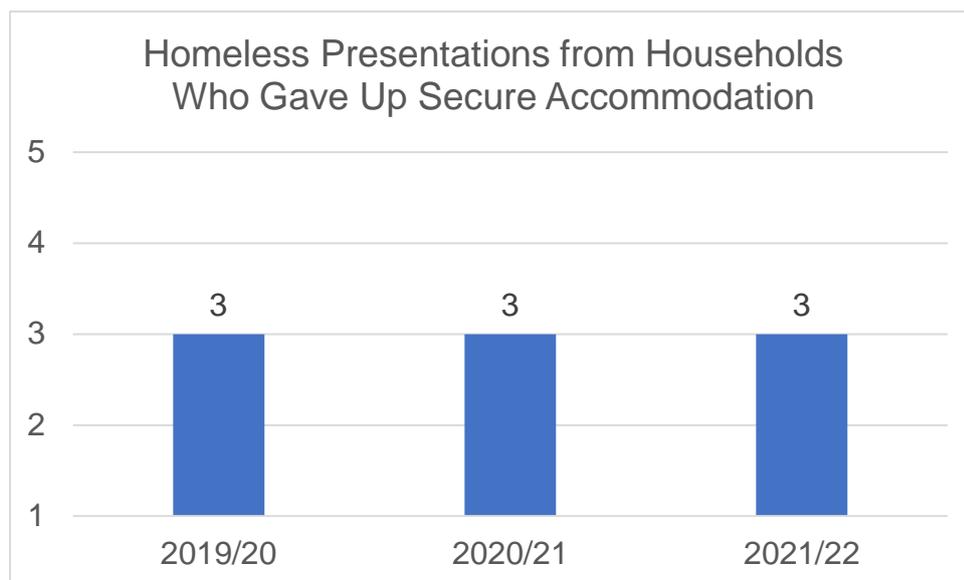
## Other Causes of Homelessness

### Mortgage Default / Loss of Accommodation Due to Rent Arrears

The level of homeless approaches in Orkney due to mortgage default or rent arrears was very low with one case for the financial years of 2020/21 and 2021/22 and two cases during 2019/20. This would suggest that preventative work whether through legislation which requires mortgage lenders and landlords to notify the local authority in the event that they are taking action to recover a property as a result of debt, or through referral for appropriate financial advice is relatively effective.

### Given up Secure Accommodation

Since our first Homelessness Strategy, homeless approaches as the result of giving up secure accommodation that was otherwise available for the household to occupy (for example leaving a council tenancy because it was felt to be in the wrong area or to be too small) has remained a small but significant cause of homeless presentations and an area which remains an important focus. Further analysis of these cases suggests that a primary motivator in such cases is a desire to move to a different area or to a bigger / better property. In instances where households were advised not to leave the property before approaching, they were subsequently found to be intentionally homeless.



## **Discharge from hospital / prison**

In 2021/22 there was one presentation as homeless on discharge from either hospital or prison – the same number as the previous year. Testament in part to the success of the protocols in place with Orkney Health and Care's Criminal Justice Service and the Integration Joint Board. However, there is no room for complacency and an increasingly ageing population could mean that this becomes an issue in the future.

## **Throughcare / Aftercare**

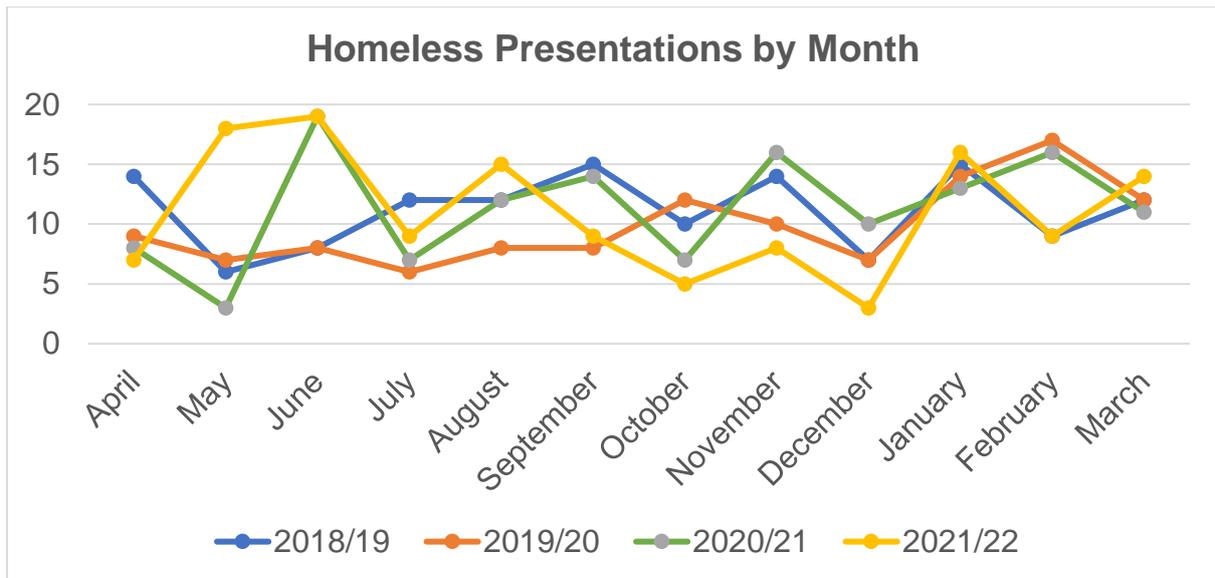
The Council has a Protocol on Housing and Young People Leaving Care. This is intended to ensure that young people leaving the care system, are able to access accommodation and the support they need without the need to present as homeless. The level of accommodation provided to this client group is monitored through our annual report to the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee in relation to homelessness. A section of the report is devoted to the allocation of all Council vacancies by the specific type of housing need and area. Our Protocol on Housing for Young People Leaving Care, provides more detail on the issues facing this client group and our responses to those.

## **Repeat Homelessness**

The number of cases where an applicant was found to be homeless or threatened with homelessness on 2 or more occasions in a 12 month period is relatively low in Orkney and amounts to only one or two cases per year.

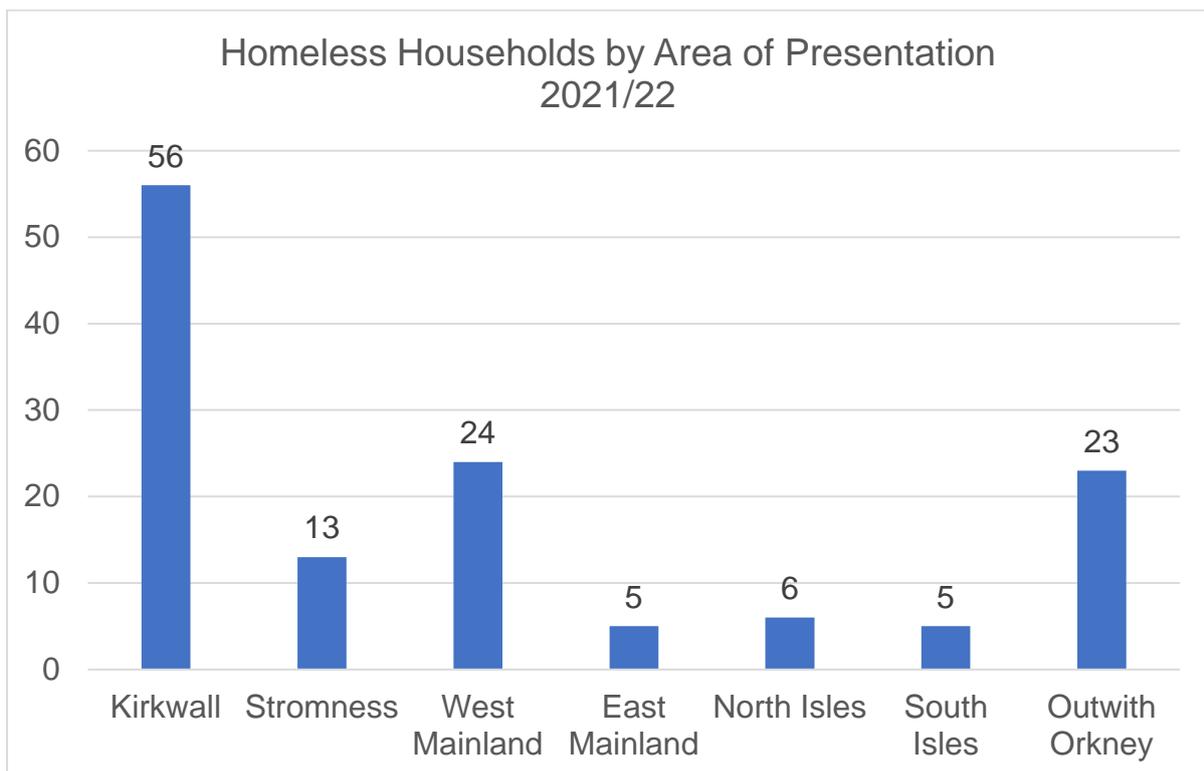
## **Seasonal Issues**

Presentations in Orkney do not remain entirely steady throughout the year and more work needs to be done to understand why presentations are higher at certain times of the year. An analysis of seasonal trends could potentially assist with planning for both temporary accommodation and to a lesser degree for permanent housing. However, an analysis of the trends does indicate that there is less seasonal variation than was the case in the past. The chart below looks at presentations on a month by month basis since April 2018. What specifically is evident is a drop in presentations in December annually but with November and January showing higher levels of presentations accordingly. Presentations were lower during April and May 2020, predominantly due to the COVID-19 lockdown and this was immediately followed by a predicted rise in presentations.



## What Areas Do Applicants Approach From?

### Geographical Location



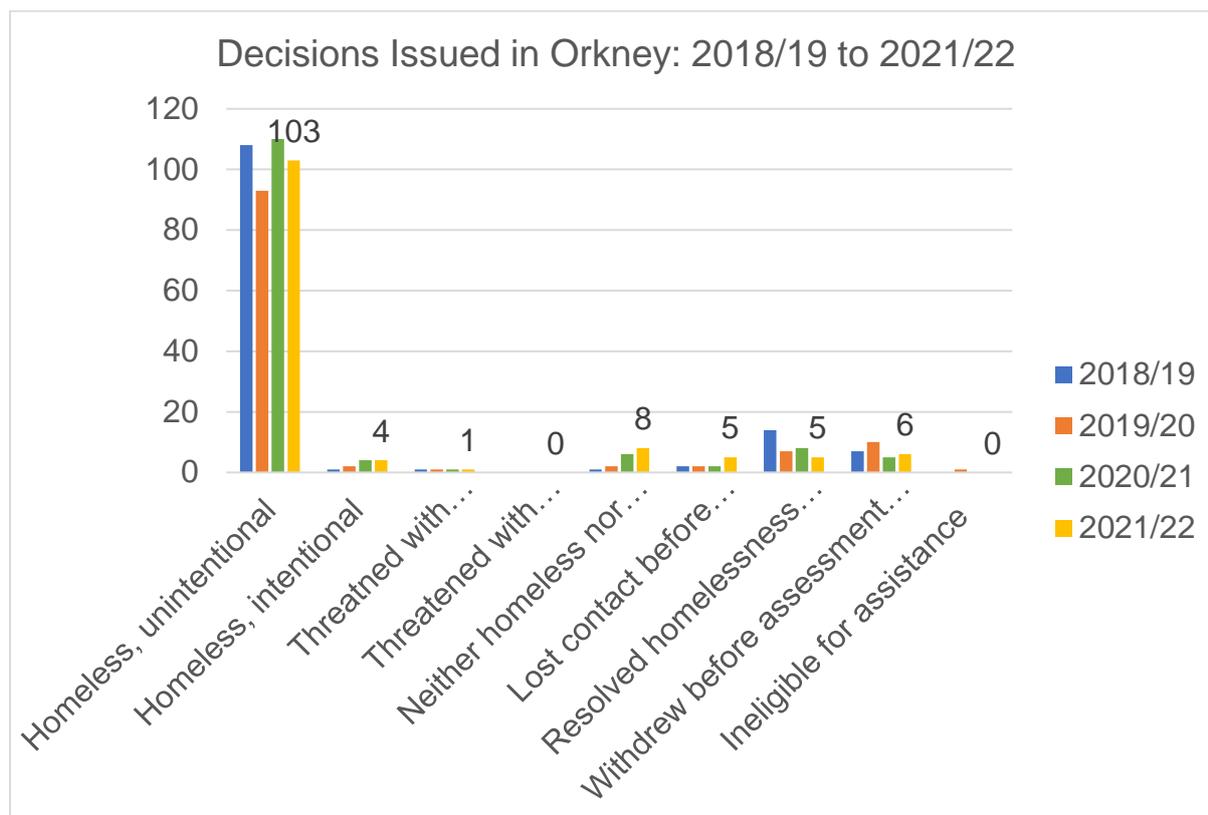
The table above shows that 42% of homeless applications originate from Kirkwall. A further 32% originate from elsewhere on the Orkney mainland. As regards applications from outwith Orkney, during financial year 2021 to 2022, there were no cases which had no local connection. Therefore, the households represented either had a local connection with Orkney or had presented as a result of issues of domestic abuse or harassment which meant that local connection was not an issue.

## Ethnicity of Applicants

Although presentations from ethnic and minority groups remain low compared to Scottish levels as a whole, there is consistently a small number of approaches made by individuals from Eastern Europe.

## Decisions

The following table gives a breakdown of decisions made on homeless applications in the 3 years covering 2019/20 to 2021/22. As can be seen the ratio of decisions has stayed largely the same across the period.



### Homeless, Unintentional, Local Connection

Year on year, the majority of those assessed under the homelessness legislation have the full homelessness duty accepted. That is to say they are found to be unintentionally homeless and with a local connection. There is a duty to provide temporary accommodation to this group until an offer of appropriate permanent accommodation is secured. During financial year 2021/22 the Council accepted a duty to permanently rehouse 74.2% of households who presented as homeless.

### Homeless, Intentional

The numbers of intentionally homeless decisions are relatively low. The Council took a decision in November 2020 to continue to assess intentionality following changes to the Homeless etc (Scotland) Act 2003, which in effect allowed a local authority to opt out of investigating intentionality. In 2021/22 there were five households found to be homeless intentionally.

## **Homeless, Unintentional but with No Local Connection**

The number of cases where a household is found to have no local connection with Orkney, are relatively limited. Local connection focuses on whether a household has been resident in the area for 6 out of the last 12 months; 3 out of the last 5 years; has a local connection due to family reasons or other special reasons. During financial year 2021/22 there were no cases where the household was found to have no local connection.

Changes to local connection took effect at a national level from November 2022, and Orkney raised its significant concern about the impact this may have if, in effect, households can choose where in the country they present as homeless. An islands impact assessment was undertaken by the Scottish Government. The impact of the change in legislation will be monitored accordingly.

## **Lost Contact / Homelessness Resolved prior to assessment**

There has been a slight increase in the number of homeless cases where contact has been lost with the applicant prior to the homeless assessment being finalised. In 2021/2022 this figure was 5 of all cases closed in this year 3.4% of cases compared to 2.2% of cases the year before. The low level of lost contact is in part at least due to the adoption of a more proactive approach to homeless prevention and assessment, with staff working with households to identify a range of housing options where possible. In some instances however, the resolution may only be temporary (for example moving out of temporary accommodation and in with family / friends) and may lead to a further homeless approach in the future.

## **The Use of Temporary Accommodation**

The Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan has replaced its Temporary Accommodation Strategy. The use of temporary accommodation and length of stay within temporary accommodation is monitored closely and the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan aims to reduce the time households spend in temporary accommodation.

In most cases homeless applicants are offered short term tenancies in self-contained properties, and where possible in an area where they wish to be.

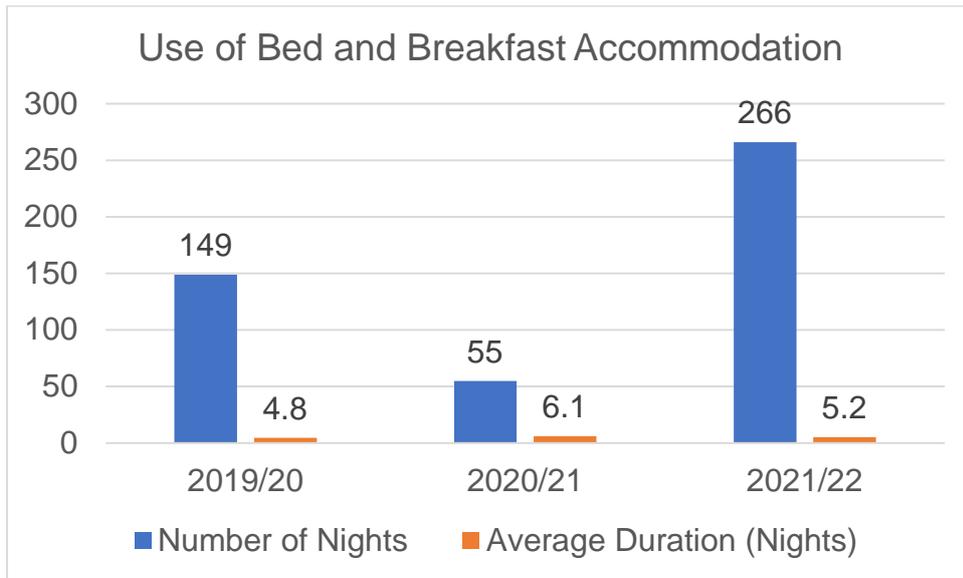
During the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of temporary accommodation escalated significantly. In order to address this, additional properties were taken from our permanent stock, in order to ensure temporary accommodation could be provided where required.

As of 31 March 2022 there were 46 homeless households in temporary accommodation. Throughout the financial year 2021/22, the number of households in temporary accommodation has generally been above 58 households. At any one time throughout 2021/22, the families being accommodated included an average of 11 children.

As at 21 February 2023, 72 households were in temporary accommodation, 13 households were awaiting temporary accommodation while staying with friends /

family and therefore don't need temporary accommodation. This represents a significant rise in demand for temporary accommodation.

Changes to the Unsuitable Accommodation Order in effect prevent the legitimate use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for housing homeless households. Because of the ongoing pandemic, temporary exemptions were in place until 30 June 2021 in certain limited circumstances. The graph below shows the use of Bed and Breakfast in 2019/20 to 2021/22. While the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation has been greatly restricted for a number of years and is only used in emergency situations, its occasional use is sometimes necessitated.



## Homeless Prevention

In 2021/2022 the Housing Services provided housing advice and information to 18 clients. The level of housing options / advice cases relative to those which later became formal homelessness presentations is as follows:

Financial Year.	Number of Cases.	Went on to Present as Homeless.
2018/19.	31.	5.
2019/20.	19.	4.
2020/21.	22.	8.
2021/22.	18.	3.

This service has the potential to expand if it were sufficiently resourced. Ideally the pressure on social housing could potentially be reduced if there were a staffing resource which could focus on helping clients to explore all the options that may be available to them.

## Conclusions

Orkney has seen the level of homeless presentations fluctuate slightly over recent years in comparison to a relative decline in housing options and advice and

information cases. The key causes and trends in homelessness identified from this section will be considered in the final section of this profile.

## **Part Four: Current Services**

### **Why Look At Current Services?**

Part Four of the Profile of Homelessness in Orkney looks at the services currently available to those finding themselves homeless in Orkney.

In 2002, when our first Homelessness Strategy was being developed, a robust assessment of service provision was undertaken which allowed the identification of gaps, from there a means of filling each gap was explored, whether by expanding existing services or the creation of new ones.

Since then, service provision and joint working have moved on significantly. However, it remains important to continually assess service needs and determine whether service provision continues to meet those needs.

Although there are still few services which are specifically dedicated to homelessness, many agencies play a key role in the prevention and alleviation of homelessness in Orkney, including assisting with the provision of temporary accommodation. Many agencies offer services across a range of disciplines but for ease of reference we have split the range of services offered into the areas of:

- Emergency / Temporary Accommodation.
- Advice and Information Services.
- Housing Support.
- Health Services (General Provision).
- Mental Health Services.
- Drug and Alcohol Services.
- Relationship Breakdown.
- Services for 16 - 25 year olds.
- Children's Support Services.
- People with Particular Needs.
- Other.

It is acknowledged that many agencies in Orkney take on much broader roles with generic services than would be likely to be found in more urban areas. It is essential that the Homelessness Strategy continues to harness this willingness to be flexible and adaptable. Only by agencies being willing to look beyond initial remits and continuing to be open to a range of possibilities, can we ensure that assistance is available to the broadest possible cross section of our communities.

It is also acknowledged that this list is not intended to be exhaustive and that some services outwith Orkney are accessible by various means including electronically.

### **Emergency / Temporary Accommodation**

The Council previously produced a Temporary Accommodation Strategy. However, the development of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan has presented an opportunity to amalgamate these two documents appropriately.

In the main, the Council's temporary accommodation comprises furnished tenancies from within the Council's general needs stock. There are four properties from Orkney Housing Association Ltd. There is more specialist provision aimed at specific groups including young people with support provided by Right There, refuge and support services provided by Women's Aid Orkney for women and their children (if any) fleeing domestic abuse.

The Housing Support Duty requires that all homeless households who are assessed as unintentionally homeless and in need of support, are provided with support accordingly. The Council has a protocol and generally provides support from within its own staffing resources.

Supported accommodation is provided by various other agencies for the following groups:

- Women and their children (if any) who have experienced domestic abuse; (Women's Aid Orkney).
- Young people of 16 – 25 years who require support to develop independent living skills (Right There).

Protocols have been developed between the Homelessness Section and the agencies responsible for the supported accommodation detailed above.

### **Leasing Arrangements**

The Council has a policy covering the leasing arrangements to homeless households. This allows the usage of two different types of tenancy agreement being:

- A Contractual Common Law Tenancy (for periods of up to 6 months).
- The Short Scottish Secure Tenancy (for periods of over 6 months).

Both tenancy agreements afford tenants increased rights and security, the use of the Short Scottish Secure Tenancy particularly allows a greatly increased level of rights for those tenants to whom we have a long term duty. This was intended primarily to increase their levels of security, to ensure tenancy conditions could be enforced in situations where this was necessary, for instance where another household's rights were compromised, or to prepare the household for the types of conditions provided by a full Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement.

### **Furnished Tenancies**

Most applicants who are placed in temporary accommodation are offered a furnished tenancy. This is done at an early stage in proceedings and more often than not before a decision has been reached as to the long term duties owed. Most properties are taken from the Council's stock and a small number of others are leased from Orkney Housing Association Ltd.

At present a homeless applicant can expect to spend up to 9 months (if waiting for a smaller property) and 8.9 months (for a larger property) in such a tenancy before being offered permanent accommodation. These timescales have generally increased over the last 3 years. However, this increase was intensified in 2020/21 as a result of the pandemic. In general terms the cause of the increased time in temporary accommodation is as a result of smaller building programmes being undertaken leading to a smaller number of properties being available for allocation coupled with a mismatch in size and area of available properties relative to the demand in respect of homelessness.

The costs incurred in equipping a property can be considerable. Originally, in order to seek to counteract this and to ensure value for money for the Council, the rent charges on emergency properties include a furnishing charge of £22.69 per week (as at 2022). Since the introduction of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan in 2019, we have frozen rents on emergency accommodation in recognition that there is an issue with affordability.

Council policies on seeking to bring in additional charges to assist with budget deficits present a challenge from the context of affordability for homeless households. There is a policy on charging for the storage of a homeless household's furniture and other belongings. The revenue raised as a result of this is also considered alongside possible costs of bad debt etc. Where relevant, the provision of an unfurnished tenancy may be a potential to limit recharges for that household. Each case is considered on its own merits and this situation arises relatively infrequently.

### **Bed and Breakfast**

The Council's Housing Service tries to avoid the use of Bed and Breakfast to house homeless households. However, there are times when this is not avoidable but every effort is made to keep its use to a minimum and we are endeavouring to ensure there are no breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order.

### **Women's Refuge: Phoenix House**

Owned by Orkney Housing Association Ltd and managed by Women's Aid Orkney, Phoenix House Refuge can accommodate up to three households at any one time and each household is likely to remain in the refuge for 3 – 6 months until they feel ready to move on. Support is provided on site.

Four properties which are sited beside the refuge have been leased to Orkney Islands Council, for use as move on accommodation from Phoenix House. Each property is equipped with security equipment such as CCTV systems to allow increased security for the households concerned. Support can be provided by Women's Aid Orkney from the Refuge. In addition, moveable CCTV packages are held which can be sited on a property within the wider community which may allow the household concerned to remain in their own home.

During 2021/22 Women's Aid Orkney supported 149 women and 60 children and young people. They received a total of 155 new referrals (119 women and 36 children and young people). The occupancy rate for the refuge was 55%.

## **Young Persons' Supported Accommodation for Those Aged 16 – 25**

Two facilities offer the above supported accommodation for those who lack independent living skills with support provided on site by Right There.

In Kirkwall, 3 units of supported accommodation are provided at Glaitness Farm House. In addition, 6 units of move on accommodation are provided on the same site.

In Stromness, the accommodation at John Street, provides 4 separate rooms, one of which has an en suite and kitchen area. Additionally, there is a 5th room which is also en suite and used as accommodation for support staff.

In 2020/21 Right There provided support for 25 young people in supported accommodation and occupancy rates were on average of 89%.

### **Team Manager (Housing Support)**

In recognising the high level of support some of those presenting as homeless need, Orkney Islands Council's Housing Service has employed a qualified social worker to assist with the provision of that support. The Team Manager (Housing Support), assisted by a Housing Support Officer, works to ensure the housing support needs of homeless people are appropriately met. Through a detailed assessment process in line with the Housing Support Duty introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, the Team Leader (Housing Support) identifies and co-ordinates the housing and wider support needs of service users. The Team Leader (Housing Support) is separate from the dispersed Home Support Team and this enables the Officer to respond to cases which may require assistance to sustain a tenancy but otherwise may fall outwith the criteria for Home Support.

### **Home Support Team**

The Home Support team is dispersed in structure. One officer is placed within Housing Services. This ensures support is available to those who need it while they are placed in emergency accommodation and while they move on and settle in permanent accommodation.

Housing support is intended to be short term and aimed at those who can benefit from a housing support service usually provided for less than two years. Staff offer floating support to homeless households.

It is felt that such 'floating' support is generally more appropriate in an Orkney context than static support linked to specific units of accommodation. However, there are problems with ensuring that this level of support is available to those approaching as homeless from the outer isles.

## **Right There Well Being Service**

Right There Orkney have developed a new wellbeing service, this provides additional (day support) support for young people accessing accommodation. The Council commissioned a service from Right There to ensure support is on site between 5pm and 11pm as well as sleep over, 7 day per week in both Glaitness and Stromness supported accommodation. The wellbeing service also offers:

- Practical and emotional support.
- Move on support from supported accommodation to permanent tenancies.
- Support in people's own home and in the community.
- Support for people of all ages who are using drugs and alcohol.
- Mental health support for people up to age 25.

## **Emergency / Temporary Accommodation – Shortfalls in current service provision**

Possible gaps exist in service provision for those with a particular need due to the low level of presentations from this group for example those with physical disabilities. Although certain adapted properties are held for use as homeless accommodation, their availability cannot be guaranteed. This could be addressed through an agreement for priority rehousing with Orkney Housing Association Ltd. However, economies of scale and a limited level of provision throughout the combined stock generally, mean that adapted properties cannot remain empty in case a need arises under emergency situations.

Provision of temporary accommodation is now evidenced through our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan. While the solution is to endeavour to permanently rehouse homeless households more swiftly, this would require increased levels of housing development. Currently the level of subsidy per house meets a proportion of the overall costs only and the proportion required from the Housing Revenue Account is substantial.

Orkney's Housing Revenue Account is too small to enable sufficient funds to be raised from tenant contributions through rents and currently a substantial review of the HRA Business Plan is underway to determine the likely level of affordable building going forward.

## **Emergency / Temporary Accommodation – The Way Forward**

The Housing Service at Orkney Islands Council is committed to maintaining good quality fully furnished accommodation for those finding themselves homeless. However, consideration will be given to the best means of providing for certain groups. This may include consideration of different accommodation models. Currently building of new units is being restricted to smaller units due to subsidy restrictions and affordability issues as outlined above.

## **Advice and Information Services**

The Council has a comprehensive, specialist housing advice service with its main remit being to prevent homelessness wherever possible and to follow a housing options approach to homelessness prevention.

This Service has a vital role to play in providing households with advice and information / housing options interview about the situations they find themselves in, this may include the validity of Notice to Quits, an individual's rights to the matrimonial home and general housing options advice. This provision is offered to those who approach the service with sufficient time to allow their homelessness to be prevented, however, it is not necessarily extended to those who are being assessed under the homelessness legislation as a result of the limited time available to the household concerned. Ideally this situation needs to change, as there are various situations where homelessness could legitimately be prevented, this may include in cases of relationship breakdown where there is no abuse. Equally a household threatened with homelessness inside 2 months has a right to a homelessness interview and gatekeeping must be avoided.

The Council has a comprehensive Advice and Information Strategy which aims to continue to improve advice provision in the area generally. In addition, this includes joint working with a range of other organisations in Orkney who provide housing advice. Detailed below are some of the other organisations concerned.

The Council's Homelessness and Advice Service is accredited to type 2 with the Scottish Government's quality assurance accreditation, the National Standards for Advice and Information Providers. This has been held since 2008. Achieving this accreditation included ensuring that all staff were trained to a nationally recognised level through successful completion of the Professional Development Award in Housing Law for Advisors currently offered through Shelter. In addition, the Council offered funding and support to a range of other agencies who offer housing advice to enable them to achieve the accreditation as well. This has included Orkney Housing Association Ltd and Orkney Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB).

### **Citizens Advice Bureau**

The CAB is the main provider of independent, free, general advice and information in Orkney. At present the CAB only have an office in Kirkwall, although contact can also be made by phone or by e-mail. In addition, surgeries are run in various islands over the summer months. The CAB also has a comprehensive national website.

Like all CABs in Scotland, Orkney's is linked to the Shelter Housing Aid Centres enabling them to access specialist housing advice if required.

Orkney CAB employs a specialist Homelessness and Welfare Rights Officer, which is funded through the Homelessness Strategy's Local Outcome Agreement. This post provides independent housing advice, assists with benefits appeals and assists those who wish to appeal the Council's decisions etc. Representation in court is also offered in various circumstances.

Orkney CAB also offers independent money advice services. These include assistance with multiple debt and any applications under the mortgage to rent scheme etc. This area, along with the Homelessness and Welfare Rights Officer, include covering the requirements of Section 11 of the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003. Section 11 requires all Registered Social Landlords, Private Sector Landlords and Mortgage Lenders to notify the Local Authority before taking action to evict or repossess property.

Orkney CAB also offer home visits to clients who cannot attend the office and offer video appointments using the Near Me software. They can also meet with clients at other agencies if required – for example they often meet clients at Orkney Blide Trust's premises.

### **Orkney Housing Association Ltd**

Orkney Housing Association Ltd (OHAL) is Orkney's only Registered Social Landlord and as such works closely with the Council to assist in the prevention and alleviation of homelessness.

The provision of housing advice including advice on housing options (including low cost home ownership options), relationship breakdown and tenancy sustainment is provided by OHAL as part of normal service provision. OHAL provides permanent accommodation for a substantial proportion of homeless households to whom we have a long term duty. Arrangements for this are made under a protocol for Section 5 Referrals, which is a process by which the Council can refer a homeless household for permanent rehousing.

### **Women's Aid Orkney**

Women's Aid Orkney provides housing advice for women and their children, if any, who have experienced domestic abuse. This is likely to include advice on security of tenure, their rights under the homelessness legislation, how to access legal representation and the possibility of seeking interdicts etc.

### **Public Health**

Whilst the role of Public Health will be considered in more depth at a later stage in this document, it is included here as they are a key provider of advice and information on a range of health-related issues and are easily accessible to those who are homeless / threatened with homelessness.

It plays a particular role in relation to providing advice to accessing health services and advice on healthy eating for homeless households etc.

### **Legal Advice**

There are a number of Solicitors in Orkney who can advise on people's legal position and rights.

## **Independent Advocacy in Orkney**

Orkney Citizen's Advice Bureau currently provides a free, confidential and independent advocacy service for vulnerable adults in Orkney.

They provide an invaluable service for those who would otherwise find it difficult to access assistance. They support and enable people who are vulnerable (perhaps because of old age, infirmity, learning disability, dementia or mental health problems) to speak up for themselves and exercise their rights as individuals.

A specific Children's and Young Persons Advocacy service that specifically works with people who have been looked after and those in receipt of mental health services is available from a different provider which will be highlighted later in this document.

## **Job Centre Plus**

The Jobcentre Plus can advise applicants on benefit entitlement and employment opportunities and should not be underestimated as a source of advice and information. In addition, work coaches available through Jobcentre Plus can give advice on the support available when returning to work or starting a business.

Those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness may also be referred as relevant, to other agencies such as the CAB for income maximisation advice.

## **Community Learning, Development and Employability**

The Community Learning, Development and Employability Support Team (CLDE) can assist anyone living in Orkney, to improve their outcomes through learning. The role of CLD is to support individuals, groups, and communities to make a positive change in their lives or in their community by using a range of different approaches including youth work, community-based adult learning, family learning, volunteer development, employability support and community development. The Service can offer practical assistance, personalised one-to-one and group work support to people who are looking to increase their confidence, knowledge and skills in various areas and progress towards learning, training or employment.

There is a focus on expanding partnership work with housing partners to explore CLD approaches and preventative work around homelessness with young people.

## **Housing Advice and Information Provision – The Way Forward**

When our original profile on homelessness was being developed in 2002, advice provision in Orkney was much less well developed than is currently the case.

In order to ensure appropriate standards of advice were provided, various key agencies agreed to join together in aiming to become accredited to the Scottish National Standard for Advice and Information Providers, with the Scottish Government. Currently (2022) these agencies are:

- Orkney Islands Council's Homelessness and Advice Service.
- Orkney Citizen's Advice Bureau.

In addition, Women's Aid Orkney and Right There undertook the required training through Shelter's related training programme to ensure their knowledge met the appropriate standards.

Provision of information has traditionally been through relevant leaflets and posters and increasingly is provided through electronic means including our online housing options guide. This allows people to identify who they can contact for more specific information or at a point of housing crisis.

The Homelessness Strategy needs to ensure the ongoing need to organise training on homelessness and other related issues to a wide range of agencies. Although training should be delivered on an approximately annual basis for a range of agencies, it would be advantageous to seek to determine where the agencies concerned feel they would like to receive training and whether they feel there are gaps in their knowledge and this will be taken forward through the relevant groups.

## **Support Services**

### **The type of support required**

The support needed by those finding themselves homeless varies significantly from case to case. Some of the more vulnerable clients require daily contact and help with all aspects of maintaining their tenancy – budgeting, home care, self care and more. Others require little more than a fortnightly check that everything is okay. Improvements have included the employment of a qualified Social Worker (Team Manager (Housing Support)) supported by a Housing Support Officer previously introduced through the Homelessness Strategy.

### **Support for the Family**

Where necessary our Housing Support Officer will ensure that Home Start is bought in to offer help to families with children under five. In addition, Relationships Scotland Orkney offer support and specialist counselling to help prevent relationship breakdown, and child-focused family mediation, as well as a child contact centre where parents can see children they no longer live with. They also offer various specialist forms of support including for Primary School age children and their families, help and advice for separated parents and specialist substance use support and counselling. Voluntary Action Orkney also provides a befriending service.

Other services exist which can offer assistance in some situations. Orkney Blide Trust runs a befriending service for those with mental health issues which can allow family members a break from the supportive role if only for a short period of time. In addition, this allows the individual concerned to talk to someone from outwith the family unit if required.

## **Team Manager (Housing Support)**

Based within the Housing Services the Team Manager (Housing Support) is a qualified social worker, offering support to those in temporary accommodation, as well as in secure council tenancies. Following liaison with, and referral to, other agencies this enables a comprehensive support package to be identified at an early stage.

In addition, a dispersed 'Home Support Team' was created to provide support for those who need it on a short term basis (for up to 2 years) in both temporary and permanent accommodation across a range of tenures. The team have built on the foundations already laid by the Team Manager (Housing Support). In addition to providing intensive support where needed, the team also works to link tenants into more mainstream support services and one officer is based within Housing Services.

Floating housing support is available to people who live in all types of tenures including those who are owner occupiers. The service provides short term housing support which is aimed at those who can benefit from a housing support service usually provided for less than 2 years.

## **Domestic Abuse**

The development of Phoenix House, Women's Refuge made significant inroads towards meeting the needs of women and children fleeing domestic abuse, with targeted support being provided onsite. In addition, the close liaison between Women's Aid Orkney and our Housing Support Service will ensure that victims of domestic abuse in temporary accommodation (whether in the refuge or elsewhere in the community) can access specialist support as well as more general assistance.

## **MARAC**

A Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) is a meeting where information is shared on domestic abuse cases deemed to be high risk. Representatives of local police, health, social work, housing practitioners, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors, probation and other specialists may attend. This structure is also vital to tackling domestic abuse at a local level.

## **Men's Aid**

Although there is no local provision, Men's Aid can be accessed for any male victims of domestic abuse and Relationships Scotland Orkney offer support for male victims.

## **Victim Support**

Victim Support Scotland provides practical and emotional support and information about the Criminal Justice system to victims, witnesses and others affected by crime. This includes support for male victims of domestic abuse.

## **Employability Orkney – Supported Employment Project**

Employability Orkney helps to provide a range of sustainable supported employment, training and volunteering opportunities for people who may face a barrier to gaining employment. This includes individuals with a learning disability, physical disability, mental health needs, alcohol/substance misuse need; those who are ex-offenders, care leavers, long-term unemployed and anyone who may experience a disadvantage in entering the labour market.

### **Health Services (General Provision)**

A Housing Contribution Statement has been developed in order to append the Integration Joint Board's Local Strategic Commissioning Plan. This is intended to highlight the contributions made by housing services to assist with the role of the Integration Joint Board.

#### **GPs Surgeries**

The nature of homelessness in Orkney is such that most homeless applicants continue to access their Doctor as before.

However, we continue to source information from the questionnaire sent out to homeless applicants, to ensure that issues aren't arising re access to health services specifically.

GP's and other Health Professionals have a key role to play in providing advice and access to information for homeless applicants. They are often, in Orkney, the one constant that an individual has in a period of sometimes traumatic change.

#### **Dentists**

As outlined above in relation to GP provision, the nature of homelessness in Orkney is such that most homeless applicants continue to access their dentist as before.

However, we continue to source information from the questionnaire sent out to homeless applicants, to ensure that issues aren't arising re access to dental services specifically.

#### **Public Health**

Public Health works across a range of areas with the aim of reducing health inequalities whilst improving the health and wellbeing of the people in Orkney. For individuals, NHS Orkney Public Health deliver and commission a number of services to support health.

- The Nordhaven Clinic (Orkney's sexual health clinic) is a service commissioned through Public Health. Situated in Skerryvore GP practice it offers a free and confidential service which includes STI testing, access to contraception including emergency contraception and free condoms, pregnancy testing and sexual health related advice.

- The NHS Orkney polytunnel project aims to assist mental health and wellbeing through engagement with green spaces. This has provided a space for groups or individuals to access a green space but also engage in gardening activities and are open 7 days a week from 8am to 9pm. One of the tunnels, which is wheelchair accessible, can provide a relaxed location and be booked by groups. Additionally, there are plots available to garden either as individuals or groups.
- Quit Your Way Orkney is a free, confidential specialist stop smoking services offering one to one support including support to stop smoking during pregnancy. Specially trained stop smoking advisors provide advice, guidance and support to people who smoke to quit in a way that suits them. Community pharmacies, such as Boots and Sutherlands, also deliver stop smoking service.
- Orkney's Public Health Team also deliver a range of training for professionals and volunteers including 'Money Counts' which is a one-hour session designed to help frontline staff and volunteers to best use the 'Worrying About Money?' leaflet to support people struggling with money worries or financial crisis.
- 'MAP – Motivation, Action, Prompts' training supports participants to develop knowledge and skills relating to health behaviours change techniques to them to support others to make small manageable positive health behaviour changes in their own lives. 'Confidence to Cook' training to train is available from the Public Health Team.
- Vaccinations to protect against a range of infectious diseases are available in Orkney and a GP registration is not necessary to access this service.
- General health advice can be found through the NHS inform website at <https://www.nhsinform.scot/>. Information about NHS Orkney services can be found on the NHS Orkney website.

## **Mental Health Services**

As with many other areas, Mental Health Provision in Orkney is with the notable exception of Orkney Blide Trust, largely limited to that provided by Orkney Health and Care and NHS Orkney. The teams all work closely together and with Orkney Blide Trust to ensure that services provided are constantly being evaluated and improved.

### **Orkney Blide Trust**

Orkney Blide Trust is a third sector organisation whose remit is to promote and provide support to individuals and their families who suffer from mental ill health.

It aims to provide opportunities for those with mental illness or mental health problems, to meet others with similar difficulties and help them to find the best means of addressing their problems. They offer befriending, floating / home support and a daily (including Saturday and Sunday) drop in centre in Kirkwall as well as a café and a number of support groups.

## **Community Mental Health Team**

The Community Mental Health Team comprises qualified specialist mental health professionals, social workers and support workers. It offers support for people with mental health needs. The team is divided into different services: substance misuse, psychology, CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services), generic community psychiatric nursing, mental health social work, and a memory team. The latter service supports people with dementia and offers help with health and social care needs.

## **Mental Health – The Way Forward**

The Housing Service is committed to working with both the statutory and voluntary sector to improve the services offered to those suffering from mental health problems who become homeless or who are threatened with homelessness.

## **Drug and Alcohol Services**

A number of services exist in Orkney for those ready to acknowledge they have a problem with substance misuse and the time has come to deal with it. Fewer perhaps for those who are not yet ready but in need of support to deal with day to day situations.

## **Alcohol and Drugs Partnership**

The local Alcohol and Drugs Partnership is very proactive in its approach and ensures that the issues surrounding substance misuse are represented and addressed in a variety of strategic documents.

In recent years its awareness raising campaigns have become much more prominent and it provides an article quarterly for the Housing Service's Newsletter 'Housing News'. This is linked into the Health and Homelessness Action Plan with the intention of ensuring that issues of substance misuse are targeted at households who may benefit from information or assistance.

## **Counselling and Advisory Services for those with a drug or alcohol issue**

Counselling services are available for those who suffer either from their or own or other's misuse of alcohol and /or drugs and those who have personal problems or lifestyle issues. These are provided by Relationships Scotland and Right There depending on the age group of the individual seeking counselling. It should be possible to source a range of services including one-to-one counselling interventions, group work support, education, information and training.

Relationships Scotland Orkney is commissioned by the Alcohol and Drug Partnership to provide specialist substance misuse counselling for adults. In addition, the Service has a Substance Misuse Support Worker who offers harm-reduction support and family support (CRAFT) for loved ones, which can be especially helpful where someone is not yet ready to engage in therapy but wants to change their behaviour.

Healthy and responsible attitudes towards alcohol and awareness of the dangers of drug misuse are promoted to assist those seeking to address their problems by offering counselling and support by a variety of methods. Relationship Scotland Orkney offer specialist substance misuse counselling as outlined above, which can help to explore the underlying reasons for the substance use, where someone is ready to explore their triggers. Help is offered also through counselling for low self-esteem, stress, depression, anger, relationship, gambling and other 'addictive' disorders. In addition, they offer a specific counselling service for young people affected by drug or alcohol issues.

### **Health Board Home Detox Nurse and the Substance Misuse Worker**

Specialist teams exist within Orkney to work specifically with those with substance misuse issues. These officers provide a valuable link into other mainstream services and help build trust with clients who would otherwise be unwilling to engage with those trying to offer assistance.

### **Alcoholics Anonymous**

There is an Alcoholics Anonymous group in Orkney, and this is undoubtedly a great source of support for many people. The group through its co-ordinator also works to promote the needs of alcoholics in Orkney for access to treatment and support.

### **Support for Those Who Aren't Ready to Stop Drinking**

Not everyone with a perceived drink problem is at the stage that they are ready to address that problem and work needs to be done to develop services for this group. For example, not all agencies feel comfortable putting care workers into a situation where the client may be volatile and intoxicated. We need to work together to ensure that everyone is able to access basic support whatever stage on the 'road to recovery' they are at, whilst ensuring that the safety of those offering that support is not compromised.

### **Relationship Breakdown**

When our original profile of homelessness was developed, it was noted that with the exception of the Citizens Advice Bureau there was a lack of independent practical and affordable advice for those involved in a relationship breakdown.

Services for those involved in relationship breakdown have moved on considerably since then and various processes have been developed to enable individuals to find out what rights they have and how to access support to exercise those rights.

A leaflet was produced to provide specific information on housing rights, covering all tenures, for those who were experiencing relationship breakdown. This clearly outlined the roles of various partner agencies including the Council, OHAL, OIPDL, Orkney CAB, Women's Aid Orkney and Victim Support Orkney.

However, continued high levels of homelessness due to relationship breakdown would suggest that some issues remain. Given the nature of the housing sector in Orkney, the Homelessness and Advice Section has been offering assistance to those who advise their relationship has broken down but there is no abuse as

housing options for this group are very limited. This area needs to be explored further as other possibilities may exist.

We need to work with current service providers to ensure that the range of advice and assistance available is expanded. Ideally people should be able to easily identify whether it is likely that they would have sufficient equity from the sale of a property to fund two separate homes or whether they would qualify for one of the low cost homeownership schemes available.

### **Counselling and Mediation Orkney**

Relationships Scotland Orkney offers specialist, free and confidential relationship counselling provided by professionally trained counsellors who can help those experiencing relationship difficulties with a view to reconciling or agreeing an amicable separation.

Where a couple have separated or are separating, Relationships Scotland Orkney provide specialist, free and confidential Family Mediation where a professionally trained mediator helps them to manage the process and make arrangements for their family.

Where children live with one parent and are unable to see the other parent in their own home, Relationships Scotland Orkney's child contact centre provides a safe space where children can see the parent or other relative they no longer live with. This can be supported (staff are on hand), supervised (staff are present at all times) or help with managing handovers between parents where there is high conflict or they wish to minimise contact with each other.

Referrals of homeless households or households threatened with homelessness can be referred where they may benefit from their services. This includes, but is not limited to, family mediation and services for young people.

### **Women's Aid Orkney**

Currently delivering the range of services for women (and their children) who are experiencing Domestic Abuse, Women's Aid Orkney provides information as well as practical and emotional support for individuals. This is provided both on-site at Phoenix House Refuge and move on accommodation at Phoenix Terrace and also on an outreach basis. In addition, there is a drop in facility at Phoenix House in Kirkwall.

### **Orkney Rape Counselling and Advisory Service (ORSAS)**

Orkney Rape Counselling and Advisory Service (ORSAS) provides information and support for anyone aged 13 and over who has experienced sexual violence recently or in the past. Family, friends and professionals supporting survivors can also receive support. ORSAS provide advocacy for anyone considering making a report to police or going through the legal process in relation to these crimes. They undertake independently evaluation prevention programme in secondary schools, training in the community and with professionals on sexual violence. They campaign to improve service responses to survivors.

## **Victim Support**

Practical and emotional support is provided to male victims of domestic abuse where required. This can be provided through the local offices or by contacting the national helpline.

## **Services for 16 – 25 Year Olds**

In 2002, when the original profile of homelessness was developed, Orkney did not have any established organisations giving advice and assistance specifically to young people under 25. This has changed significantly since then with the development of the Young Scot local project. This allows young people to seek information and assistance on a range of different matters.

Now, two facilities offer supported accommodation for those who lack independent living skills with support provided on site by Right There.

In Kirkwall, there are 3 units of supported accommodation provided at Glaitness Farm House. In addition, 6 units of move on accommodation are provided on the same site.

In Stromness, the accommodation at John Street, provides 4 separate rooms, one of which has an en suite and kitchen area. Additionally, there is a 5th room which is also en suite and used as accommodation for support staff.

The Voluntary Action Orkney run the Connect Project. The Project offers individualised support and learning programmes for young people (15-21) who are facing barriers or challenges after school and are not yet ready to enter the workplace or manage more formal training programmes or further education.

They help build confidence, health and wellbeing and life skills and assist with transition onto the next steps that are right for them. They maintain regular contact with those who have moved on and assist with ongoing financial, living or employment issues or advice as requested.

## **Youth Workers**

Throughout Orkney there are Youth workers who work with groups and individuals on a range of issues. They are an essential first point of contact especially in the more rural communities. In some cases posts have been developed to work on specific issues such as drugs misuse.

## **Right There- Youth Counselling (Y-Talk)**

Y-Talk is provided by Right There and is Orkney's youth counselling service. It is a free and confidential service which specialises in counselling for young people up to the age of 25.

Y-talk provide support through issues such as substance misuse, stress, depression, anxiety, trauma, adverse childhood experiences, loneliness, isolation, low self-esteem, low confidence, suicidal ideation, anger or bullying. The counselling is provided at locations throughout Orkney, a counselling base in Kirkwall, and offers face to face sessions. Online or telephone counselling is also available.

### **Counselling and Mediation Orkney**

Services are offered to assist in cases of family breakdown to allow young people to learn about family relationships and to assist them to rebuild relationships where necessary. Where avoiding family breakdown is not possible assistance can be given to manage the emotional aspects of moving away from home, increasing the potential for future reconciliation and embedding learning to avoid similar breakdown in future relationships.

Orkney Youth Counselling was initially set up in September 2004 to address the needs of young people encountering problems with alcohol and substance misuse. Since that time the service and developed to include the counselling of children with parent drinkers and to do preventative work with teens experiencing low level psychological difficulties.

### **Training Providers**

Lifeskills Centres is a training provider that helps people into work and offers a wide variety of courses and skills essential to finding work. People are eligible for the courses if they are unemployed and are 16 years of age and over. They are designed to assist people to move into an apprenticeship, employment or self employment.

Referrals to the courses can be made via Skills Development Scotland.

### **Under 25's – The Way Forward**

If we are to take a holistic approach to homelessness, it is essential that all agencies dealing with those under 25 are fully involved in the creation of the homelessness strategy. Agencies involved in Education and training young people have a vital role. The work they do with young people in preparing them for employment, spills over into many other aspects of their lives. This can help break cycles of homelessness as well as unemployment. They can also act as an information point ensuring that the people they are training can access advice and assistance in relation to housing issues. There is a need for this to be developed further to include pre-tenancy training and various home making skills.

The Homelessness and Advice Section need to build on existing arrangements to offer all agencies dealing with young people regular briefing sessions not only on homelessness law, but also advice services available. Work should also continue to build on referral systems already in place ensuring that assistance is available when it is needed.

It is important to ensure that the referral system between agencies is a two way process. There is a need to ensure that where housing is the first port of call, young people can be helped to access appropriate support and training from a range of sources.

The existing case conference system which is operational where a young person is involved with two or more agencies, has been shown to be effective and should continue and be further developed to ensure that all the needs of that young person are being met.

### **Children's Support Services**

In general terms the needs of children are well met in Orkney. Agencies such as HomeStart work alongside the statutory agency to ensure that families with children under 5 receive as much support as they need. Whilst the Children and Families team within Orkney Health and Care work to identify and work with children at risk.

Within the Education System there are teachers who fulfil a 'guidance' role and again this is invaluable in supporting those experiencing difficulties.

Where a homeless family is placed in temporary accommodation there is a need for close joint working between agencies to ensure minimum disruption to schooling, and this is something the Education Service and Housing Service are already working on. There is also the need to strengthen the links between the Homelessness and Advice Section and Schools so that more practical preventative work can be undertaken.

### **Older People / Physically Disabled**

There are many voluntary agencies in Orkney offering support and assistance to these groups and on the whole they work well alongside the statutory agencies. Having said that, from the perspective of housing, the system often fails when someone is admitted to hospital following, for instance, a fall and is ready for discharge, but unable to return to their home. It is felt that in many instances earlier intervention could avoid the need for a stay in emergency accommodation. This is something that the homelessness strategy will look to address.

As an increasing proportion of the local population falls into older age brackets, adaptations to property becomes more of a pressing issue to ensure that homelessness from the perspective that a property is no longer suitable for the household's needs can be avoided wherever possible. This may include adaptations such as the provision of level access showers and handrails/ramps.

During 2021/22, 55 adaptations were carried out to Council properties, including level access showers, grab rails in the shower, hand rails on paths etc.

There is an evidenced need for both wheelchair and amenity standard housing, this is evidenced through planning of the Local Housing Strategy and allocations systems. This currently amounts to 277 properties within OHAL's stock, mainly in two and three apartment size, but some larger properties. Approximately 79% of the properties concerned are to be amenity standard with the remainder being

wheelchair accessible. In addition the Council holds 105 properties which are adapted. In 2021 5 additional units of supported housing for particular needs was developed.

Sheltered housing with warden facilities is currently available in Kirkwall and Stromness. Extra care housing has been developed in Kirkwall, St Margaret's Hope and in Westray to allow older people to remain independent for as long as possible. These have been shown to provide successful provision and outcomes for tenants.

### **Age Scotland Orkney**

Age Scotland Orkney is a local independent charity which has been working with and for older people in Orkney for over 30 years, previously Age Concern Orkney. Our mission is to support, inspire, involve and empower older people in Orkney, and influence others, so that people here enjoy better later lives. We inspire older people by encouraging them to realise their opportunities and overcome the challenges of later life. We involve older people by connecting and engaging with them through our networks and enabling them to participate in groups and their local communities.

#### **Our Services-**

- Here2Care person centred care at home.
- Here2Help traditional home help and companionship.
- Good day calls - a daily wellbeing check.
- Podiatry clinic run every day.
- Christmas lunch working with The Salvation Army – reducing loneliness.
- One stop shop for information and advice, support and signposting.
- Post Diagnostic Support – Dementia.
- Dementia Orkney Project - Community Hub.

### **Crossroads / Orkney Carers Centre**

These organisations aim to improve the quality of life for carers and those for whom they care, by giving information, emotional support and practical help. Crossroads works with a range of clients and offers both long term and short breaks for the elderly and disabled.

### **Dementia Orkney – Carers Support Group**

This is an independent support group open to the family and friends of people with dementia. Members give mutual support, exchange information, share experiences and coping skills with each other.

### **Care and Repair – Orkney**

Orkney Care and Repair offers independent advice and assistance to help homeowners repair, improve or adapt their homes so that they can continue to live in comfort and safety in their own community.

Orkney Care and Repair offers personal, financial, and technical support to people facing the difficult task of repairing, improving, or adapting a home which is no longer suitable to their needs.

Initially targeting elderly, disabled and low-income groups throughout Orkney, they now can offer the service to a much wider client base, through delivering the 'Scheme of Assistance' originally awarded by Orkney Islands Council in 2011. This means that now anyone living in privately owned or rented properties can access a wide range of housing related assistance.

Without Care and Repair, many vulnerable households would be unable to maintain their home. Orkney Care and Repair is managed through Orkney Housing Association Limited.

### **Handy Person Service**

The Small Repair Service is part of the service delivered by Orkney Care and Repair and helps older and disabled people and those on low incomes to carry out minor repairs and ensure that properties remain in good condition. This has proved to be a popular and effective service.

### **Orkney Disability Forum / Dial a Bus**

Orkney Disability Forum acts as an umbrella organisation for voluntary groups and individuals concerned with the welfare of disabled people and the statutory bodies in Orkney responsible for the provision of services for the disabled. Its aims are to improve services, encourage integration in the fullest sense and provide joint action for the welfare of physically and mentally disabled people of all ages in Orkney.

Dial-a-Bus is a door to door transport service for people with disabilities or mobility problems.

### **Older People / Physically Disabled – The Way Forward**

Not everyone can be placed in a box' saying 'older person', 'elderly' or 'disabled' or 'alcoholic', and more often than not, a number of 'labels' can be applied to any one individual. Those over the age of retirement are no different and it is not always easy to identify and fully meet support needs. The Homelessness Strategy needs to identify the fact that some people are not easy to work with, and indeed often don't want the support identified as being needed.

There is also a need to ensure that admission and discharge protocols are reviewed regularly to enable us to avoid wherever possible the use of temporary accommodation. The ultimate aim must be to identify and address the potential risk long before a stay in hospital precipitates a crisis. The Discharge Protocol needs to be rigorous and to consider more closely a possible increase in older people having difficulties in managing an existing property following a stay in hospital.

### **Other**

Some services fall outwith the main classifications but still play a vital role in the prevention and alleviation of homelessness.

## **Restart Orkney**

This is one of Employability Orkney's projects. Its aim is to provide low cost second hand furniture to those on low incomes, including homeless households. Homeless households are able to access furniture at a greatly reduced cost. The scheme has been proved to assist greatly with tenancy sustainment.

## **Starter Packs Scheme**

This scheme is run by Kirkwall Council of Churches. It provides great assistance to homeless households in setting up a permanent tenancy.

Starter Packs include items provided partially by donation and partially by specific purchase and cover crockery, cutlery, kitchen utensils and small electrical items and linen. Individual starter packs are targeted at the needs of the household concerned.

## **Orkney Food Bank**

The Orkney Food Bank provides healthy food for households in times of crisis. Various agencies, including the Housing Service, can refer clients to the Food Bank.

Orkney Food Bank can issue emergency parcels to organisations to issue to someone in crisis until a full referral can be made. Currently 2022 – the foodbank is only open Tuesday and Friday.

In addition, they can issue an electricity top up so clients can heat the food they give them. Orkney Foodbank funds this but THAW Orkney administer on the electricity top ups on their behalf.

## **THAW Orkney**

THAW Orkney can work with clients and officers on key aspects of fuel poverty - undertaking home energy assessments and in some instances providing electricity support in the form of vouchers.

## **Service Provision – Conclusions**

Not every agency who works with those who are homeless or potentially homeless in Orkney has been identified in this section. This is because in reality there is not a single agency in Orkney that has not at some point, however unknowingly, worked with someone who is homeless or threatened with homelessness.

Many agencies in Orkney take on broader roles and provide generic services that would be unlikely in more urban areas. It is essential that the Homelessness Strategy, Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and accompanying Advice and Information Strategy continue to harness this willingness to be flexible and adaptable. Only by agencies being willing to look beyond initial remits can we ensure that assistance is available to the broadest possible cross section of our communities.

Service provision has moved on considerably from our initial profile of homelessness in 2002. Although significant inroads have been made it is important to remember that further improvement and expansion should continue in order to provide the best homelessness services possible. The addition of supported accommodation for those experiencing drug and alcohol issues would be beneficial.

## Part Five: Conclusions

Whilst a document of this size can only serve as an introduction to the issues surrounding homelessness in Orkney, we believe that it contains much valuable information. The first four sections of this profile have considered many topics surrounding homelessness in Orkney, from a general overview of housing related issues in Orkney to a more detailed analysis of the causes of homelessness and those most vulnerable to it. What this document has tried to do is to both assess the current extent and impact of homelessness in Orkney, and to look at how effective the work undertaken during the past 5 years has been in addressing the issues raised in the previous profile.

Additionally, it has tried to highlight the areas where there is room for improvement, as well as the things of which Orkney is justifiably proud. Listed below are some of the key messages we need to take forward from this profile and into the homelessness strategy.

- The group most at risk of homelessness are single people, within the category of single people there remain 2 distinct sub groups:
  - 16 to 24 year olds – this group find it particularly hard to find accommodation because of relatively low incomes and rules relating to the shared accommodation rate under the local housing allowance. Additionally where accommodation is secured it is often threatened by a lack of appropriate support.
  - 25 to age of retirement – since the previous profile was written, changes to the legislation have resulted in this group becoming entitled to permanent accommodation thus significantly changing the landscape in respect of homelessness provision. The challenge to the Council is primarily in respect of the sheer availability and existence of smaller properties.

The Homelessness Strategy must identify ways of assisting these groups to access decent affordable long term accommodation.

- More people present as a result of relationship breakdown than for any other reason. In order to reduce presentations from this group a wider range of housing options and access to affordable housing must be developed.
- Family and Friends no longer being able / willing to accommodate is another key cause of homelessness in Orkney. In some cases this is where young people have been unable to secure alternative accommodation, and in other households have returned to family after the loss of other accommodation. Only by working to ensure that a wide range of housing options are available to all sectors of our communities will be able to reduce presentations from this group of households.
- We need to do more work to identify hidden homelessness in Orkney in general, and in the outer isles in particular.
- Repeat homelessness, often linked to relationship breakdown is an issue in Orkney and steps must be taken to address it.

- Recent 'emergency' presentations have shown that the Council must prepare for the unexpected.
- Realistically the number of people accepted as homeless, unintentionally so, and with a local connection is going to remain at a higher level.
- There are also concerns in terms of homelessness services about the ageing population of Orkney. There is an ever increasing need not only for supported or sheltered accommodation but also for accessible accommodation close to amenities. There is also an impact on the availability of care and support services.
- There has to be a greater emphasis on homeless prevention / housing option services. The aim being to assist a household before a crisis point is reached.
- Finally there is the need to balance out the services needed by different groups and communities to ensure that no one group or community is disadvantaged.

In updating this profile our aim has been to provide the information needed to ensure that the next Homelessness Strategy for Orkney does not only identify the real issues affecting both households and service provisions but come up with some practical solutions that will have a real impact over the next five years.